AFTER THE BATTLE

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HORST WESSEL

Number 75

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Front Cover: The Horst Wessel story. Relevant locations depicted on a historical map published by the Senator für Stadtentwicklung und Umweltschutz, Berlin, illustrating the city as it was in 1940 with the modern street layout overlaid in brown.

Centre Pages: This was the nerve centre of Britain's Black Propaganda campaign against Germany. The wartime studios at Milton Bryan, Bedfordshire, from which Sefton Delmer and his team broadcast to Europe.

Back Cover: The Preddy brothers, George and William, rest in perpetuity in the Lorraine American Military Cemetery at St Avold.

Photo Credits: IWM — Imperial War Museum. LBS — Landesbildstelle Berlin.

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Later this year, *After the Battle* will be publishing *Berlin Then and Now*, covering not only 1939–45 but also the years before and after, right up to the re-establishment of Berlin as the capital of Germany. Our author, Tony Le Tissier, has served for over twenty years in the British Army and has lived in Berlin for the last sixteen. He has therefore been in a unique position to study the battle for the city from the military point of view and is also ideally qualified to write on post-war Berlin, having served in the British Military Government for fourteen years prior to Unification. He was also the British Governor at Spandau Prison at the time of Rudolf Hess' suicide. As a foretaste, Tony now describes just one of the many events to be included in the book: the death and subsequent 'canonisation' by the Nazis of one of their revered heroes, Horst Wessel, killed in Berlin in 1930. *Above:* **Tony, an officer in the Royal Military Police, in his appointment as Assistant Provost Marshal, with an RMP motor cyclist in front of the Soviet War Memorial built beside the East-West Axis in 1945.**

The Soviet Army Victory Day parade that Tony is 'inspecting' took place on Sunday, May 8, 1977. As readers of *Berlin Then and Now* will discover, the Germans have a penchant for frequently changing their street names according to which particular political faction is in power at the time. Hitler renamed the 'Charlottenburger Chaussee' the 'Ost-West Achse' (East-West Axis) on his birthday in 1939 (see also *After the Battle* No. 64), and it was changed again, to the 'Strasse des 17. Juni', to record the uprising in the Soviet Sector of the city in 1953.

HORST WESSEL

By Tony Le Tissier

Few that have seen the film *Cabaret* will fail to have been moved by the emotional impact of the Hitler Youth singing the *Horst Wessel Song* in the beergarden scene, even though the English words in the film were not an exact reflection of the original 'Die Fahne hoch!' (Raise high the flag!). It is therefore not difficult to understand how the patriotic appeal of this song became one of the most powerful tools in the hands of that master-propagandist, Dr Josef Goebbels.

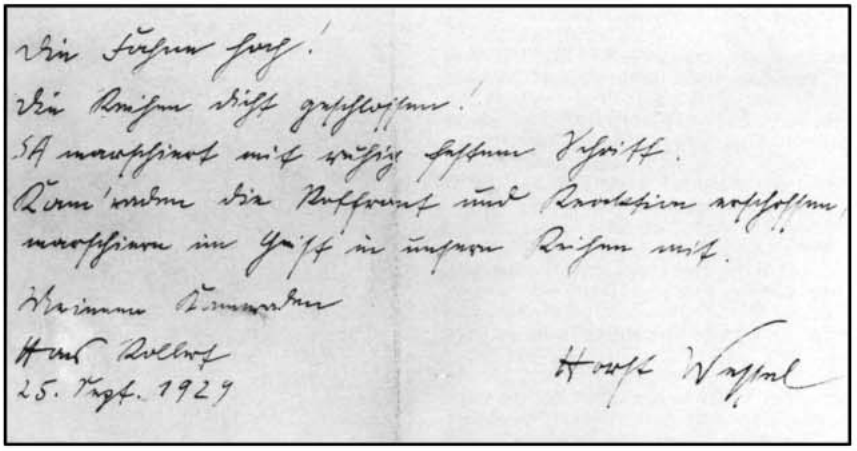
Goebbels was appointed Gauleiter of the Nazi Party in Berlin by Hitler in late 1926, an astute move, for Berlin was then a strongly socialist city as well as a hot-bed of communism and it would need all of Goebbels' talents to win converts to the Nazi cause. Goebbels entered enthusiastically into his task, conducting his party events as if on a crusade, sending his SA bully-boys out to fight in the streets and in the assembly halls against the Rotfrontkämpferbund (Red Front Combatant League), and always looking for casualties of his side to be presented as victims of Communist atrocities in his *Der Angriff* ('The Attack') newspaper.

Sixty years ago the streets of Berlin were in turmoil as rival 'gangs' of SA (Sturmabteilung) storm-troopers fought with members of the Rotfrontkämpferbund (Red Front Combatant League). There were deaths on both sides as the Nazis struck out at their traditional Communist opponents, whose headquarters *(left)* was in the predominantly socialist borough of Friedrichshain. The building had been named after a Communist martyr, Karl Liebknecht, who had been murdered in 1918. *Right:* The Karl Liebknecht Haus today, but in the period between these two pictures lies a fascinating story.

Left: **Werner Wessel, Horst's father, lived in Jüdenstrasse in the borough of Mitte, a small street running past the Rotes Rathaus (named, so we are told, after the colour of its brickwork, not the political persuasion of the incumbents). Unfortunately the picture does not quite show the house, No. 51/51, which is just off the picture to the left. (LBS)** *Right:* **All the buildings on the street, save for the Old Stadhaus, were demolished in the large-scale redevelopment of East Berlin by the Communist authorities in the 1950s. The scaffolding on the right is on the corner of the Red Town Hall; the Wessel house would have stood approximately where the car is parked.**

An early convert was Horst Wessel, then a 19-year-old law student and son of a prominent preacher whose last appointment was at the St Nikolai Church in Berlin and who had been a padre at Generalfeldmarschall von Hindenburg's headquarters during the First World War. Following his father's death in 1926, Horst became an active member of the SA, abandoning his legal studies and middle-class upbringing to sample life in the working-class and strongly Communist district of Friedrichshain, where he worked variously as both a taxi driver and a builder's labourer. Many of the SA men were former Communists, for both parties had similar aims and methods, with the ends justifying the means, and a marked disdain for parliamentary procedures. On the previous May Day the two parties had actually marched side by side through the streets in a joint protest against the police ban on marching

After the National Socialists gained office in 1933, on the next anniversary of the day that Horst Wessel was shot (not the day he died) — January 14, 1934 — the building was dedicated as a shrine with the addition of the wording: 'In this house lived Horst and Werner Wessel who fought for Germany's honour and freedom'. (LBS)



Left: **Horst Wessel of SA-Sturm 5.** *Above:* **His poem called *Raise High the Flag* was set to a stirring melody supposedly based on a theme in the French opera *Joseph* by Etienne Nicolas Méhul. After his death it was retitled the *Horst Wessel Lied*. This is the first verse in his own handwriting. (Charles Hamilton)**

demonstrations. Horst's political career flourished and he was promoted Sturmführer of SA-Sturm 5, as well as becoming the Party's leading orator in Berlin after Goebbels.

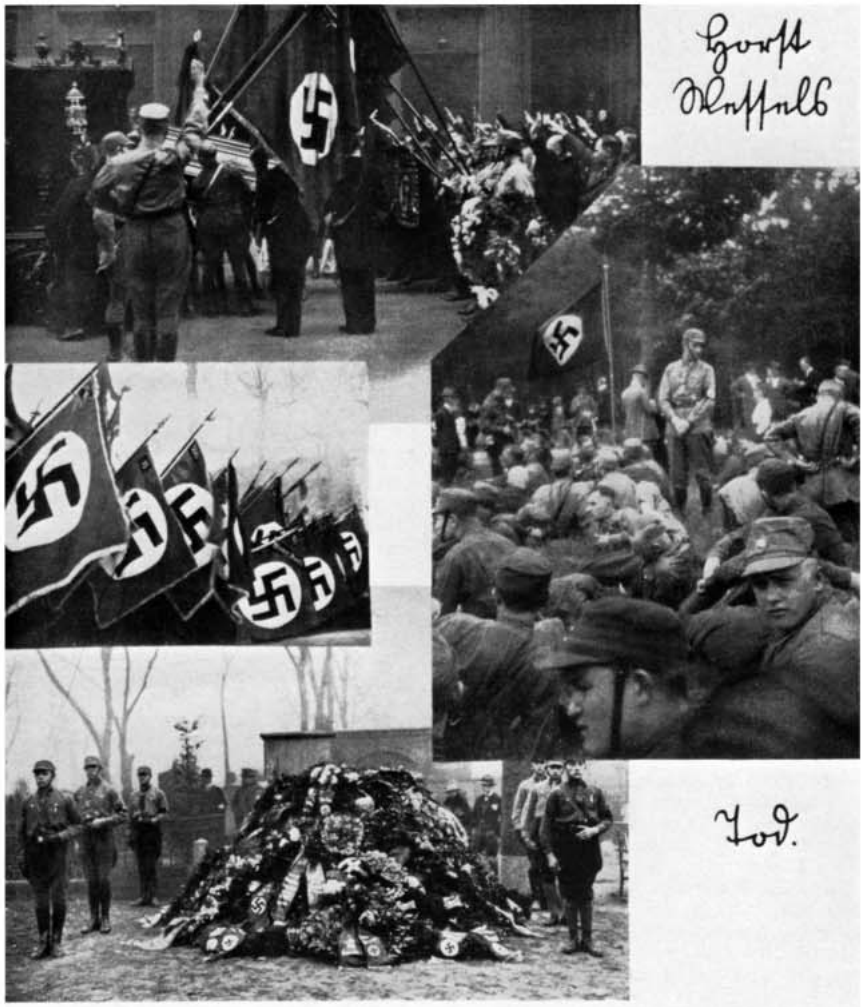
Then, one night in 1929 on his way back to his lodgings after the usual evening's clashes at the head of his storm-troopers, Horst went past the cafe 'Mexico' near the Alexanderplatz and saw a young girl being molested. Horst went to the rescue, driving off the assailant, and immediately fell in love with his damsel in distress. The girl, Erna Jaenicke, was an 18-year-old prostitute, but soon deserted her pimp and profession for Horst. Eventually they found lodgings with the 30-year-old widow, Elisabeth Salm, at Grosse Frankfurter Strasse 62 (now Karl-Marx-Allee) and Horst's political interests are said to have gone into a marked decline at this stage. However, the widow had some problems with the young couple over matters of rent and the shared use of a kitchen — one can imagine the arrogance of the young Nazi in such a setting — and decided to have them given a firm warning, or possibly even evict them, with the aid of her dead husband's old colleagues in the Rotfrontkämpferbund.

By pure chance, the leader of the twelve-man group, three of whom were armed, that was sent round to deliver the warning on the evening of January 14, 1930, happened to be Erna's former pimp, the 32-year-old Albrecht ('Ali') Höhler, who already had sixteen criminal convictions, including some for serious assault. When Horst unsuspectingly opened his bedroom door in answer to their knock, Höhler saw his missing source of income, Erna Jaenicke, in the background and promptly forgot everything else in an explosion of anger. He drew a pistol from his raincoat pocket, and shouting: 'You know what this is for!' shot Horst in the mouth. Horst collapsed, the bullet having removed his upper front teeth, ripped his tongue and shattered his palate. Before being taken to hospital it is said that he refused having the local doctor called to administer first aid because the latter was a Jew.

He had taken a room in a lodging house on Grosse Frankfurter Strasse where he lived with his girl friend, Erna Jaenicke, and it was here at No. 62 that he was shot on January 14, 1930.

No. 62 also became a Nazi shrine and it, too, suffered in the post-war demolitions. In October 1949, the Soviets established the German Democratic Republic in their zone of occupation, which included the Soviet Sector of Berlin. There, the re-development plans included the carving of an eight-lane highway — the Stalinallee — along the line of the old Grosse Frankfurter Strasse which was to be lined with Moscow-style blocks of apartments. *Right:* **However, Schilling Strasse, on the opposite side to No. 62, still survives, giving a handy reference point to where the building once lay. (In later years, Stalinallee gave way to Karl-Marx-Allee; we shall have to wait and see if we now get another name change!)**

Like any good publicist, Josef Goebbels, the Party's propaganda chief, wanted to get as much mileage out of the shooting as possible, and when Horst Wessel finally succumbed to his wound on February 23 he planned a big show funeral. This page is reproduced from Goebbels' own book *Das erwachende Berlin* (Enlightened Berlin), published in 1934 and dedicated to Wessel. The original caption says that, 'The flags must be removed from Horst Wessel's coffin at the request of the Alexanderplatz (Police HQ). They cannot march behind his corpse, because this would upset public law and order. However, Communists try to drag his body out of the hearse, and have cynically and frivolously written on the cemetery walls in big black capitals the words: "To that pimp, Horst Wessel, a last 'Heil Hitler!' " But the dead man is not dead. He lives and marches along with the brown columns. His voice still resounds from the grave, and rings with confidence: "This misery will soon be over!" '



Vom Sarge Horst Wessels müssen sie die Fahne herunternehmen, weil der Alexanderplatz das gebietet. Sie dürfen nicht hinter seiner Leiche marschieren, das würde die öffentliche Ruhe und Ordnung stören. Kommunisten aber versuchen, sie aus dem Totenwagen zu zerren, und über die Friedhofmauer haben sie in großen schwarzen Buchstaben zynisch und frivol die Worte geschrieben: „Dem Zuhälter Horst Wessel ein letztes Heil Hitler!" — Aber der Tote ist nicht tot. Er lebt und marschiert mit den braunen Kolonnen. Aus dem Grabe noch dröhnt seine Stimme, und es klingt wie feste Zuversicht: „Die Knechtschaft dauert nur noch kurze Zeit!"

This was the kind of opportunity that Goebbels had been waiting for, his newspaper giving daily reports on the condition of the victim, whom he up-graded to the status of a Saviour: 'leaving his mother and home, he took to living among those who scorned and spat at him. Out there in a proletarian neighbourhood, he made his young, modest existence — a socialist Christ, one who appealed to others through his deeds.' This, of course, was as nonsensical as the Communist counter-blasts accusing Horst Wessel of having been a pimp.

Goebbels' propaganda campaign was greatly aided by Horst having previously written a poem *Die Fahne hoch!* which had been published in *Der Angriff* and later set to music, one of several similar songs composed by him during his time with the SA. The music has been variously traced to the opera *La Légende de Joseph en Égypte* that had its début in 1807, and to an old marching song. In any case, this music, coupled with Horst's lyrics — 'The banners flutter, the drums roll, the fifes rejoice, and from millions of throats resounds the hymn of the German revolution, Raise high the flag!' — was exactly what Goebbels needed to further the cause, and he now had it sung at the conclusion of a meeting in the Sportpalast, thereby formally introducing it into the Party ritual.

Horst lingered on for five weeks until succumbing to blood-poisoning on February 23, 1930. Goebbels wrote: 'His spirit has risen in order to live on in all of us. He is marching in our ranks.'

Goebbels then planned an extravagant funeral at which Hitler would deliver the main speech, but Hitler declined, for he judged the situation in Berlin too explosive to take part. The Nazi Party was still too weak, with only twelve representatives in the Reichstag, to risk stirring up a major riot in Berlin with himself as the centre-piece.

As it was, the SA conducted cortège had to pass through proletarian areas where it could only be regarded as a provocation. The procession turned into a running battle with the Communists and even the ceremony at the cemetery took place under a hail of

The old cemetery of St Nicolai lay on the corner of Prenzlauer Strasse and Josty Strasse (although the latter has now been replaced with the Mollstrasse). When your Editor first enquired about the status of Wessel's grave, we were told by one historical body in West Berlin that the cemetery itself no longer existed but we have a horrible suspicion that we were being deliberately misled because of the subject matter. We found the cemetery still there, with the same entrance as in the 1930s. (LBS)

Although it was now obvious that we would receive very little official help in pinpointing the grave, fortunately we had these two pictures of it taken on Volkstrauertag — People's Memorial Day. Originally this was a day of remembrance for those killed in the First World War, but the Nazis disliked the connection of this date with the shameful Versailles Treaty and so introduced the Heldengedenktag (Heroes' Memorial Day) on the fifth Sunday before Easter as a more fitting alternative. (LBS)

stones from the street. There the SA roll was called and when it came to Horst Wessel's name the storm troopers replied together: 'Here!'

Goebbels' imagination came to the fore with his description of the scene in *Der Angriff*: 'As the coffin came to rest in the cool ground, a depraved cry arose from the sub-humans outside the gates. The departed, still with us, raised his weary hand and beckoned into the shimmering distance: Forward over the graves! At the end of the road lies Germany!'

By July 1930 the political situation in Germany had deteriorated to such an extent that President von Hindenburg was obliged to dismiss the Reichstag. The subsequent elections that September saw the Nazis win 18 percent of the vote, giving them 107 seats in the Reichstag, a significant increase that was to be repeated two years later with a 37.4 percent win and 230 seats, a power to be reckoned with.

The two photographs enabled us to locate the grave by reference to the background architecture. The railings on the right still remain. Following German custom (unless relatives deem to continue to maintain the grave), Wessel's remains were disinterred after burial for 25 years — in 1955 — and cremated. Today Pauline Mertsching occupies his space. (LBS)

Left: **The Communist Party HQ on Bülowplatz had suffered several police raids, particularly after the Reichstag fire when the Nazis were seeking evidence to pin the blame on the Communists. Hundreds of sympathisers were rounded up the same night of the fire and the HQ was taken over by SA-Sturm 6/6 which raised the swastika flag over the building on March 8. It was then converted into the local SA headquarters and, to rub salt into the wound, was renamed the Horst Wessel Haus, quite appropriate as his grave lay just a couple of hundred yards away.** *Below:* **During its tenure by the SA, a second doorway was cut to the left of the original one in the north-western side of the building facing a small park. This picture was taken on March 22, 1938 of marchers setting out with the standards of the Berlin SA to attend a rally at the Sportpalast to mark the incorporation of Austria into Greater Germany.** *Right:* **Falling in the Soviet Sector after the war, the building was taken back by the Communist Party who then re-converted it back to the Karl Liebknecht Haus!**

On September 23, 1930, Albrecht Höhler and his companions were brought to trial at the Assize Court in Moabit. Höhler and his accomplice, Erwin Rückert, each received sentences of six years and one month imprisonment. Josef Kandulski was awarded five years and one month imprisonment, and the widow, Frau Salm, eighteen months. Of course, this was not good enough for the Nazis and they swore their revenge. In September 1933, the year the Nazis came to power, Höhler's body was discovered by a forester in some woods near Berlin; he had been removed from his prison cell and assassinated.

In June 1934, three Communists that had accompanied Höhler on that fateful occasion to Frau Salm's, although they had not opened fire or even entered Horst Wessel's room, were belatedly brought to trial. Two of them, Sally Epstein, aged 28, and Hans Ziegler, aged 33, were nevertheless sentenced to death and executed by decapitation on April 10, 1935.

During the years of Nazi rule, Horst Wessel was developed into a folk hero. Some 250 biographies, novels and plays were written about him, numerous statues were erected in his honour, and streets and squares named after him.

However, undoubtedly the most significant memorial of all to him was the playing of his song as a second national anthem immediately after 'Deutschland, Deutschland über alles' throughout the years of Nazi rule.

The Nazis landscaped the park and added a memorial, and the square was renamed the Horst Wessel Platz, together with the nearby U-Bahn station.

Once back in Communist hands, the tit-for-tat continued with the renaming of both the platz and the station after another of their martyrs killed in 1918 — Rosa Luxemburg.

PARTY ROLL OF HONOUR AS AT THE DEATH OF HORST WESSEL

MUNICH–FELDHERRNHALLE NOVEMBER 9, 1923

Felix Allfarth
Andreas Bauriedl
Theodor Casella
Wilhelm Ehrlich
Martin Faust
Anton Hechenberger
Oskar Körner
Karl Kuhn
Karl Laforce
Kurt Neubauer
Klaus von Pape
Theodor von der Pfordten
Hans Rickmers
Max Erwin von Scheubner-Richter
Lorenz Ritter von Stransky
Wilhelm Wolf

1923

26. 2 Karl Winter, Steinen/Baden
1. 5 Daniel Sauer, Sickershausen
26. 5 Albert Leo Schlageter, Düsseldorf
26. 6 Ludwig Knickmann, Buer/Westfalen
24. 9 Erich Kunze, Podelwitz b. Leipzig
26.12 Dietrich Eckart, Berchtesgaden

1924

5. 3 Rudolf Eck, Gehren/Thüringia
21. 3 Willi Dreyer, Berlin
1. 7 Rudolf von Henke, Hindenburg
20. 9 Friedrich Just, Roggenstorf
5.12 Artur Prack, Waldfischbach

1925

26. 4 Fritz Kröber, Durlach/Baden
28. 6 Matthias Mann, Rosenheim
9. 8 Werner Doelle, Berlin

1926

21. 2 Fritz Renz, Altlandsberg
8. 6 Franz Kortyka, Mechtal
26. 9 Harry Anderssen, Berlin
27. 9 Emil Müller, Germersheim

1927

13. 2 Otto Senft, Dortmund
6. 3 Wilhelm Wilhelmi, Nastätten
10. 4 Karl Ludwig, Wiesbaden
26. 5 Georg Hirschmann, München
11. 9 Eugen Eichhorn, Oelsnitz/Vogtland

1928

19. 4 Bernhard Gerwert, Sythen
28. 4 Gottfried Thomae, Essen
2. 5 Heinrich Wölfel, Nürnberg
13. 5 Heinrich Kottman, Pfungstadt
17.11 Hans Kütemeyer, Berlin

1929

8. 2 Heinrich Limbach, Podelwitz
7. 3 Hermann Schmidt, Wöhrden
7. 3 Otto Streibel, Wöhrden
2. 8 Katharina Grünewald, Nürnberg
5. 8 Erich Jost, Nürnberg
20. 8 Franz Janisch, Vösendorf b. Wien
19.10 Heinrich Bauschen, Duisburg
20.10 Karl Rummer, Schwarzenbach/Wald
4.11 Gerhard Weber, Berlin
8.12 Friedrich Meier, Kyritz/Prignitz
14.12 Walter Fischer, Berlin

1930

23. 2 Horst Wessel, Berlin

HORST WESSEL SONG

**Raise high the flag, close the ranks, the SA marches with a calm, determined step.
Comrades shot by the Red Front and reactionaries are marching in spirit with us in our ranks.**

**The streets clear for the brown battalions. The streets clear for the storm-troopers.
The Swastikas sparkle with hope for millions. The day of freedom and bread is breaking.**

**The attack signal will sound for the last time. We are all ready for the fight.
Soon Hitler's flags will wave over every street. This misery will soon be over.**

BLACK PROPAGANDA

By Mark Kenyon

I first became aware that a secret operation had taken place in the little Bedfordshire village of Milton Bryan when my father was inducted as rector of the parish in the autumn of 1947.

It was just over two years since the end of the Second World War and in a fenced compound near the church there was a camp for German prisoners-of-war, comprising former U-Boat crews whose homes were in the Eastern Zone of Germany and who could not be repatriated due to the 'Cold War'. Occasionally, the camp warden and his family or one of the Germans came to the rectory for a meal and, in return, we were sometimes invited to a film show in the camp canteen where we enjoyed Charlie Chaplin films surrounded by officers and men who still wore the uniform of the U-Boat arm of the Kriegsmarine.

The warden told us that the camp had been some sort of radio station during the war and he assumed, from recordings of Hitler's speeches that were there, that its purpose had been to monitor broadcasts from Germany. On one occasion the warden took us into the main building and showed us the offices and studios that were still complete with their furniture and equipment. We were among the first unconnected civilians to see the Milton Bryan complex as it was: if only I had known then what I know now!

During the years that followed I often wondered about the clandestine radio station at Milton Bryan and it never occurred to me that the radio masts and buildings in the fields at nearby Potsgrove, also in my father's parish, had been anything more sinister than some sort of Post Office relay station. It was not until 1987 that the name of Milton Bryan appeared in front of my astonished eyes in a page in Janusz Piekalkiewicz's book *The Sea War*, and I first found a direct reference, albeit sketchy, to the real work that was done in the village during the Second World War.

Above: **The secret of Milton Bryan lies down this insignificant track close by the church. It was from here that 'black' propaganda — what in today's language would be referred to as 'disinformation' — was exploited to the full from 1943 to 1945. The conception, introduction and development of this facet of the Political Warfare Executive was that of one man: Sefton Delmer** *(top)*. **(Hulton Picture Company)**

Uncovering the story was not easy. Very few of the countless books written about the war contain any mention of Milton Bryan or its work, and the few that do limit themselves to a brief line or two. Despite the fact that it holds a considerable amount of material on the subject, the Public Record Office denied any knowledge of the subject but suggested that a man named Sefton Delmer 'may have written a book about his wartime experiences'. A lengthy search ended with a copy of Sefton Delmer's book, *Black Boomerang*, long out of print, and further enquiries to the source that traced it for me produced a copy of a second and more recent book, *The Black Game*, written in 1982 by Ellic Howe, the chief of the associated 'black propaganda' printing operation.

In 1987, Anglia Television produced a 30-minute documentary entitled *'Woburn at War'* which gave me a limited visual picture.

Two books and a videotape told me the story, but there was a certain amount of conflicting opinion and there were a number of questions that remained unanswered. There also appeared to be a cloak of secrecy at official level and in order to be able to write the story in my own words I needed my own sources of information.

Thanks to Professor M. R. D. Foot and a lady named Jean Howard, I was finally able to contact two men who played leading parts in the operation and I am deeply grateful to Clifton Child, the Chief Intelligence Officer (Political) at Milton Bryan, who engaged in a lengthy and detailed correspondence with me, and to Harold Robin, the Chief Radio Engineer, who lent me two cassette tapes that he recorded for the Imperial War Museum in London and on which, in an interview with Ellic Howe, he related his wartime experiences.

An appraisal prepared in connection with conservation by the Bedfordshire County Council describes Milton Bryan as 'a place of exceptional character and charm, a virtually unspoilt example of a tiny English village'. It has some 50 houses and a population of around 140 and lies some 3 miles east of the A50 to Northampton, isolated in the heart of the Bedfordshire countryside.

Milton Bryan has but one small shop and a pub. It has no regular bus service and it is a village that has to be 'discovered' by the inquisitive motorist. Those who are fortunate to find the place would be surprised to learn that Milton Bryan played a highly secret rôle during the Second World War, and it is doubtful if even the villagers themselves know anything of the operation that was carried on in the former War Department buildings near St Peter's Church.

It would be logical to assume that the isolation of the village was the governing factor in the decision to use Milton Bryan, but the reason for its selection was, in fact, quite accidental. In the summer of 1939 it was assumed that when the expected war began, London would be subjected to intensive bombing by the Luftwaffe. Accordingly, plans were made to evacuate all government departments together with a proportion of the population, particularly children. One after another, large country houses and stately homes were requisitioned by the authorities and the Duke of Bedford, horrified at the idea of his country seat being occupied by a horde of evacuee children from London's East End, offered Woburn Abbey to the government. The mansion was to be rent-free but the Duke insisted that he did not wish to meet or even see any of the government employees.

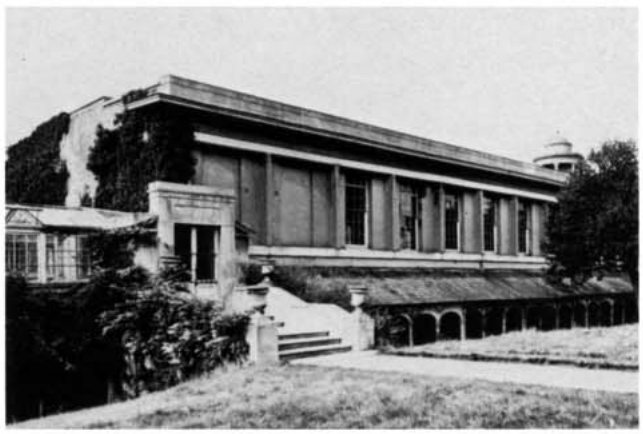
On September 27, 1938, at the height of the Munich crisis *(see After the Battle No. 62)*, the British Cabinet decided to set up a secret Department of Propaganda to Enemy Countries divorced from the existing government mouthpiece, the Ministry of Information. Its initial location was in Electra House *(above)*, on London's Victoria Embankment, the initial letters of which served as a convenient cover for what became known as 'Department EH'. (Today it has been renamed Globe House.)

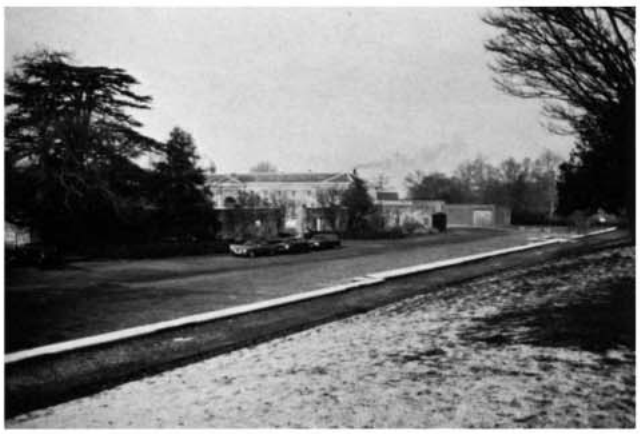
Woburn Abbey was allocated to Department EH of the Foreign Office. This was a propaganda section set up not long before the war and its cover name stemmed from its London base in Electra House. With only rare exceptions, cover names for buildings or places were their correct initial letters. Those people, whose identity it was necessary to hide, were normally given cover names that began with the initial letters of their own names.

The organisation of the British Secret Service is complicated and confusing, sometimes deliberately so, and plays no real part in this story. It is sufficient to briefly state that in July 1940, Military Intelligence Research (MIR) and Section 'D' of the Special (or Secret) Intelligence Service (SIS), which specialised in sabotage and subversion, were amalgamated to form the Special Operations Executive (SOE). Department EH was attached to SOE in 1940 but later became a Department in its own right known as the Political Warfare Executive (PWE).

Department EH was evacuated two days before war was declared. On September 1, 1939, the staff members were informed that they were to move to Country Headquarters (CH or CHQ) but its location was kept secret. They were to make their own way to Dunstable and report to a contact at the Sugarloaf Hotel, from which point transport was to be provided to CH. This, on arrival, was found to be Woburn Abbey.

The Duke of Bedford's palatial mansion was ideal. Woburn was far enough from London to be safe from aerial bombardment yet close enough for easy access to the Foreign Office by either car or motor cycle dispatch rider. The initial staff of 20 worked in offices in the riding school and lived in the flats above the stables that had formerly been occupied by the families of the ducal grooms. The fact that these buildings were separated from the Abbey by a spacious





From its small beginnings in Room 207 of Electra House, the department was dispersed on the outbreak of war to Woburn Abbey where it occupied the large indoor riding school *(left)*.

Right: **It suffered from dry rot and was demolished in 1949. (Picture by kind permission of the Marquis of Tavistock and the Trustees of the Bedford Estates)**

courtyard satisfied the Duke's requirement of no physical or visual contact. The Duke died in 1940 and the growing problem associated with a substantial increase in the number of personnel was resolved when the Abbey itself became available for use.

Clifton Child, who worked in the Abbey, was surprised at the totally unsentimental attitude of the Foreign Office towards the requisitioned houses and their contents. He worked in a room surrounded by priceless Gainsboroughs and Canalettos and used Adam bureaux as filing cabinets.

The staff of Department EH settled into their new home at Woburn and were mainly engaged in the production of propaganda leaflets. The Department also operated a number of propaganda radio stations that broadcast to Occupied Europe. Two of these were German: one right-wing, run by a German refugee, and the other a left-wing station operated by a group of German communists.

Both the leaflets and the broadcasts were of the 'white' propaganda variety, that is to say their message was simply one of encouragement to obstruct the Nazi regime.

Initially, the broadcasts were recorded at Whaddon Hall, near Bletchley in Buckinghamshire, but, as the department's activities began to expand, a headquarters with recording studios was established at Wavendon Tower in the same county. It was given the code-name 'Simpson's', which was the name of a neighbouring village.

A site for the transmitter was chosen at Gawcott, just to the south-west of Buckingham, and it was equipped with two low-powered, short-wave transmitter units each of 7.5 kW. They were RCA 4750 models and were built in the United States. Shortly after Gawcott became operational it was found that more power was needed and an identical transmitting station using the same equipment was built at Potsgrove, a small village close to Woburn Abbey.

Programmes were recorded at Wavendon Tower on American-made, 16-inch glass-based discs that were played at the then standard speed of 33⅓ rpm. To begin with, the recorded discs were played at Whaddon Hall and sent by Post Office land-line to the Gawcott transmitter. This presented an obvious security risk, and when 'Simpson's' came into being the discs were taken from Wavendon Tower by road to the Potsgrove transmitter.

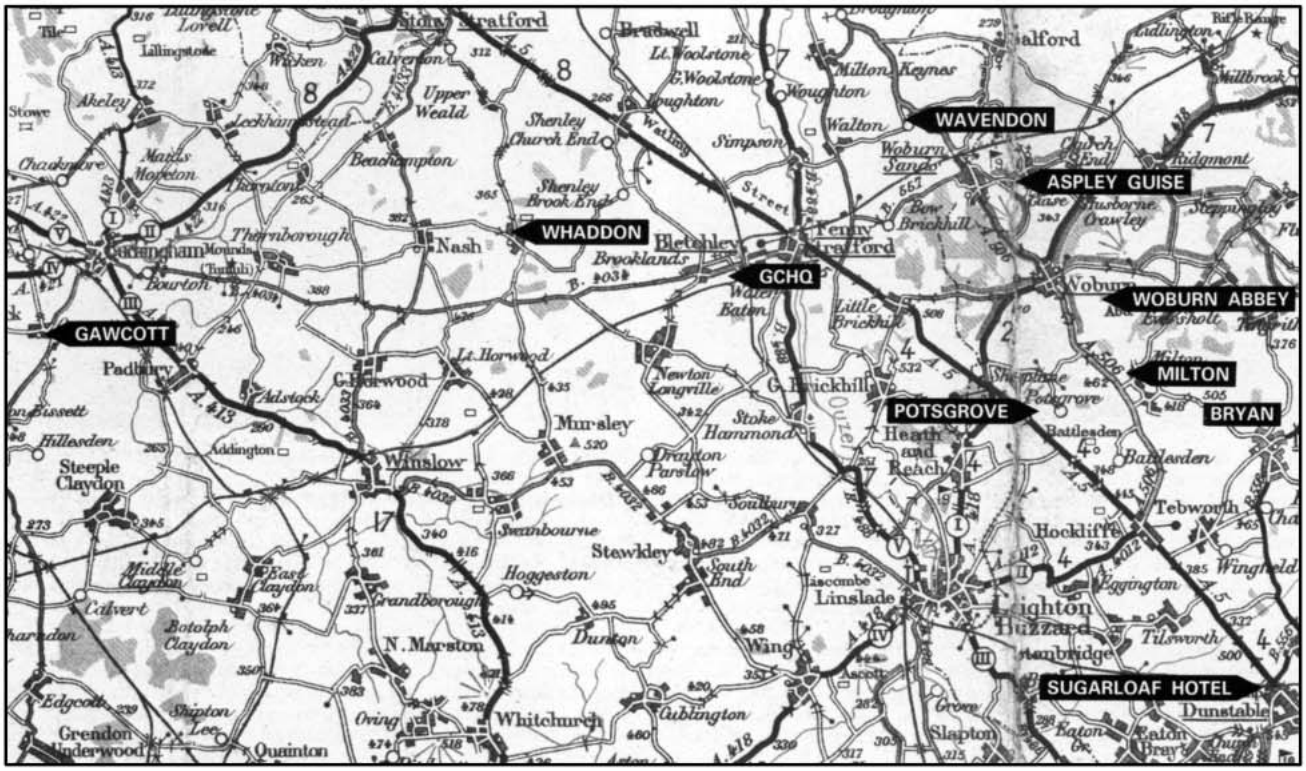
The first transmissions to German-occupied Europe were from 'freedom' stations using refugees to broadcast encouragement to the embryo resistance movements. The cover name for these stations was Research Units, and Whaddon Hall *(above)* **was taken over as a recording base. As co-operation was not forthcoming from the BBC or the Ministry of Information to provide technical support, Sir Campbell Stuart, then in charge of the PWE, spoke directly to Sir Stewart Menzies, chief of the Secret Intelligence Service (SIS) who made available his Controller of Wireless Communications, Colonel Richard Gambier-Parry, to help solve the problem.**

How the early scriptwriters and broadcasters were recruited and who recruited them is not known. Small groups of them were quartered in several requisitioned houses in the Woburn area, each managed by a resident officer whose wife often acted as 'matron'. The necessary tight security was the responsibility of a popular retired Indian Army officer based at Woburn Abbey, Colonel Chambers, who drafted the security regulations in the summer of 1941.

Many of the staff were foreign nationals with little or no English and this, coupled with the secret nature of their work, made it necessary to isolate them from the outside world. Enquiries from neighbours were answered with the simple statement that the houses were occupied by people engaged in research work for the government. The early broadcasting stations were in fact cover-named 'Research Units' (RUs). The staff were not permitted to make telephone calls, post letters locally or visit the local pub. Outgoing mail was sent to London for posting and there was a London Post Office box for incoming letters.

In November 1941, when the Gawcott and Potsgrove transmitters were completed,

Before the war, Colonel Gambier-Parry was sales manager at the Philco organisation whose American-made radios sold well in Britain. One of Philco's top technicians was Harold Robin, and in August 1939 he was quickly induced to join the SIS to assist with wireless communications. Early in 1940 Robin was asked to find a location close to Whaddon to build its short-wave transmitter. A suitable site was found some ten miles to the west near the little village of Gawcott where two American 7.5 kW transmitters were installed. Signal Hill Station remains a government communications centre today.



When PWE's activities blossomed late in 1940, additional facilities were a necessity. Bletchley had already been selected for the code-breakers of the Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ) *(see After the Battle No. 37)* and it, too, was to spread its tentacles across the surrounding area. Compared with this pre-war map, today this corner of Buckinghamshire is virtually unrecognisable as the same place with the coming of the M1 motorway and the creation of the new town of Milton Keynes. When Whaddon outgrew itself in late 1940, a second secluded mansion was found to the east of the A5: Wavendon Tower (not to be confused with the nearby Wavendon Grange taken over by GCHQ). There four recording studios were built, one in the old billiards room. Code-name for the new location was 'Simpson's'.

there were 20 RUs in operation. Nine more went on air in 1942 and a further 16 in 1943, although some of these were replacement stations. In October 1943, there were 20 active RUs and one more, the final station, opened as late as January 1945, broadcasting under the name of 'Hagedorn' ('Hawthorn').

During the post-war construction of the new town, Wavendon Tower was occupied by the Milton Keynes Development Corporation, but since 1985 it has been the head office of the computer company, SD-Scicon.

Additional transmitting facilities were set up by Harold Robin on high ground at Old Farm, just outside the little village of Potsgrove. Two 7.5 kW medium frequency transmitters were installed in the long building with a 50 kW diesel generator in the one behind. The aerials were dismantled in the 1950s and the remaining buildings given over to farm storage.

***Who's Who:* 'DELMER, (Denis) Sefton, OBE 1946; writer on foreign affairs; b 24 May 1904; s of late Prof. F. S. Delmer, Hobart, Tasmania, English lecturer at Berlin Univ.; m 1935, Isabel (marr. diss., 1946), d of late Capt. P. O. Nicholas; m 1948, Zoë Ursula Black; one s one d. Educ: St Paul's Sch.; Lincoln Coll., Oxford. Joined Daily Express, 1927; Berlin Correspondent of Daily Express, 1928-33; Paris Correspondent, 1933-36; War Correspondent during Spanish Civil War, July 1936-Sept. 1938; Chief European Reporter of the Daily Express from 1937; War Correspondent, Poland 1939, France, 1939-40, with French Army; Foreign Office, 1941-45; rejoined Daily Express, as Chief Foreign Affairs Reporter, 1945-59. Editorial adviser to Der Spiegel, Hamburg, 1963-64.'** *Left:* **In Spain during the Civil War;** *right:* **Paris 1939 — pictures made available by his son Felix.**

For the first 14 months of the war, Department EH continued with its work at Woburn, but November 1941 saw the beginning of a large-scale development and a significant change of plan that was marked by the arrival of a man who was, it has been written, 'the nearest thing to a genius which PWE produced. In fact in his particular line he *was* a genius'.

Denis Sefton Delmer was known to his friends and close associates as 'Tom', a nickname given him by his Jewish barber in Berlin, Moses Muhling, to whom all Englishmen were 'Tommies'. Delmer liked the name as it tended to distinguish him from his well-known father, Professor Frederick Sefton Delmer.

Sefton Delmer, as he was known professionally, was born in Berlin on May 24, 1904. On the outbreak of war in August 1914, his father, who was a professor of English at Berlin University, was interned. The family was allowed to remain at home and Sefton Junior continued his education at a local school. In May 1917, Professor Delmer was released and together with his family was repatriated to England where his son was enrolled at St Paul's School, later winning a scholarship to Lincoln College, Oxford. In 1919 his father returned to Germany as a member of the Allied Control Commission and Delmer spent his holidays there.

After finishing at Oxford, Delmer decided to take up journalism as a career and, speaking German like the native that he almost was, became a European correspondent for the *Daily Express*. He soon made a name for himself, not only for his newspaper but also in Germany. He was personally acquainted with Hitler, Göring, Goebbels, Hess, Himmler and the other Nazi leaders and was the only foreign newspaper correspondent permitted to travel in Hitler's entourage during the future Führer's campaign for leadership in 1932.

Delmer left Germany when war was declared and when France fell he was evacuated from Bordeaux in June 1940 in the *Madura*, the last ship to sail for England.

Delmer was keen to take an active part in the war but realised that his weight of 17½ stone rendered him unsuitable as a front line soldier. Instead, he thought that his knowledge of Germany and the German language would make him useful as an interpreter or in some branch of intelligence.

Friends involved with secret work did their best to find Delmer a job but to no avail. The knowledge and experience that Delmer considered to be of value to his country were seen in a different light by the internal security authorities and the reason for their suspicion was, it seemed, the fact that that in 1917, in the midst of war, the Delmer family had been allowed to leave Germany. After his escape from France in 1940, MI5 agents actually attempted to uncover Delmer's 'real' rôle as a Nazi activist.

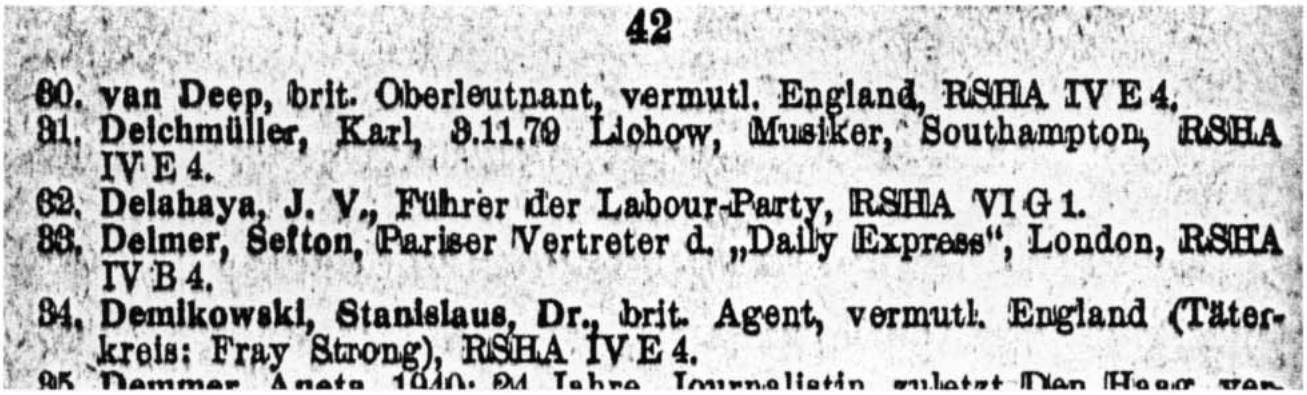
In July 1940, Duff Cooper, the Minister of Information in the new coalition government, asked Delmer to assist with improving the BBC's German broadcasts and, while continuing his work with the *Daily Express*, he began a series of programmes that were broadcast every Friday evening.

On the day of the first programme, Friday July 19, 1940, Hitler made his famous 'final appeal to reason' speech. This was during the period of the 'phoney' war when those in positions of authority still went for long weekends in the country. Winston Churchill and the Cabinet had already left London and Delmer took it upon himself, without any authority whatsoever, to give Britain's reply.

Less than an hour after Hitler's last words had faded from the ether, Delmer broadcast live from the BBC. Speaking in fluent, colloquial German, he told Hitler: 'Let me tell you what we here in Britain think of this appeal to what you are pleased to call our reason and commonsense. Herr Führer and Reichkanzler, we hurl it right back at you. Right back into your evil-smelling teeth.'

According to the American radio correspondent in Berlin, William Shirer, and to Mussolini's son-in-law, Count Galeazzo Ciano, the German reaction was a mixture of fury and disappointment. In Britain, Delmer's unauthorised broadcast raised a furore and Richard Stokes, the Labour MP for Ipswich, attacked him publicly in the House of Commons. It was only when the Foreign Secretary, Lord Halifax, replied officially two days later, and in much the same vein, that the heat was taken off.

Sefton Delmer could not have had better credentials to mastermind Britain's black propaganda campaign against Germany. His fluency with the language; his insight into the German mentality; his intimacy with the top Nazi leadership, all combined to give him the perfect background to wage his own kind of war — through the written and spoken word. These pictures, though uncaptioned, appear to have been taken by him during Hitler's 1932 election campaign.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80. van Deep, brit. Oberleutnant, vermutl. England, RSHA IV E 4.
81. Delchmüller, Karl, 9.11.79 Lichow, Musiker, Southampton, RSHA IV E 4.
82. Delahaya, J. V., Führer der Labour-Party, RSHA VI G 1.
83. Delmer, Sefton, Pariser Vertreter d. „Daily Express", London, RSHA IV B 4.
84. Demikowski, Stanislaus, Dr., brit. Agent, vermutl. England (Täterkreis: Fray Strong), RSHA IV E 4.

Delmer's pre-war activities also earned him another sort of accolade: an entry in the Gestapo's 'Who's Who'.

Delmer's talk did not go unnoticed in Germany. It earned him position No. 33 in the Sonderfahndungsliste G.B., the list of prominent Britons who, after a successful German invasion of Britain, were to be handed over to Department IV B.4 of the Central Reich Security Office — otherwise known as the Gestapo.

Delmer continued with his Friday broadcasts and in September 1940 he was asked by Leonard Ingrams if he would consider a full-time post with the BBC. Ingrams was a banker who had known Delmer in Berlin. He was now with the Ministry of Economic Warfare and also, secretly, with SO2 (later to become SOE) and SO1 (later PWE). Delmer accepted on the grounds that this was better than nothing and perhaps a step in the right direction, but once again he was vetoed by internal security.

In November 1940, the *Daily Express* sent Delmer to Lisbon and before he left London he was asked by MI5 if he would be prepared to assist while he was in Portugal if required. Delmer gladly accepted.

In Lisbon Delmer met a number of refugees from Germany and through them he was able to update himself on life in the wartime Reich. He also gained an insight into the tangled web that was the British Intelligence Service: when contacted he found that the original approach from what he thought was MI5 was in fact from MI6 via MI5. Delmer had barely met his MI6 contact when he received a telegram from Leonard Ingrams recalling him for an 'important job'. He flew back to London and was taken to Woburn Abbey where he signed the Official Secrets Act and was interviewed by Richard Crossman, the future Labour MP, and at that time the Director of the German Section of SO1.

Delmer now had the sort of job that he wanted with a secret department but he had not been told what it was! He had an office in a secret building in Fitzmaurice Place off Berkeley Square but no work, and he was at the point of negotiating a transfer to Admiral Godfrey's Naval Intelligence Department (NID) when the new PWE, through Leonard Ingrams, offered him the job that he had been waiting for. The right-wing RU had closed down when its operator was taken ill and PWE wanted Delmer to form and operate a new substitute station. He was to have complete control but able to work in close association with SOE if and when required. In operating the station there were to be no limits and no holds barred: his only guideline was that similar German propaganda stations broadcasting to Britain used offensive language. 'Do something along those lines,' Ingrams told him. The new RU was to be 'dirty' in more ways than one.

Delmer returned to his office and set to work. After studying the existing RUs he came to the conclusion that they were preaching to the converted, broadcasting to those very few Germans who were already opposed to Hitler. Delmer felt it desirable, if not necessary, to reach the great majority who currently supported the Nazis but, as these people were highly unlikely to take any notice of appeals for rebellion from Britain, they would have to be tricked. Familiar with such terms as 'black mass', 'black market' and 'black magic', Delmer christened his operation 'black propaganda'.

It was patently obvious that to simply go on the air and expect listeners to believe a station broadcasting from Britain was useless. Psychologically, it would be far better for them to find the wavelength by accident and, having done so, think that they were listening to a German military station whose bored announcer passed the time by interpolating his own views, comments and pieces of information. For the sake of credibility, though, he must give the impression that he was a loyal follower of the Führer but cynically critical of those in positions of authority. In the knowledge that all German Servicemen had taken a personal oath of loyalty to Hitler, the station would endeavour to drive a wedge between the men of the old Imperial Army and the new generation of fanatical Nazis. To sum up, the station would pretend to support Hitler but would expose a growing (and fictitious) rift between the traditionalists and the radicals. Its objective was to make its listeners think and act in ways that would undermine the German war effort.

Delmer's chosen method of operation was a deliberate gamble, for audience reception was to be entirely dependent upon 'knob twiddlers' — German military radio operators and civilians who idly turned the tuning dials on the receivers and found the station by chance.

When listeners did find the frequency it was necessary to hold their attention. The broadcasts would contain a considerable amount of truth to make them credible and the language used by the announcer would be coarse and often obscene. Delmer had a hunch that the use of barrack-room slang would encourage his hoped-for audience to keep listening and to pass the word to others.

Delmer put his idea down on paper and submitted it to PWE after first obtaining and attaching written recommendations from both Richard Crossman and Reginald Leeper, his department head. The plan was accepted.

Delmer called his station 'Gustav Siegfried Eins', the German Army signals phonetics for 'GS1', and what in the present day international system would be 'Golf Sierra One'. It meant nothing but was intended to give a ring of military authenticity. During his pre-war days in Germany when he moved in exalted circles, Delmer had noticed that the Nazi hierarchy referred to Hitler as 'Der Chef' — The Chief. His announcer, therefore, would use the same name.

Delmer left London and moved to Bedfordshire, taking up residence in a house named The Rookery in the village of Aspley Guise (RAG) where his initial team consisted of his wife, Isabel, Johannes Reinholz, Max Braun and 'Paul Sanders', whose real name was Peter Seckelmann.

In 1941, the Rookery at Aspley Guise became Sefton Delmer's secret centre of operations. Delmer occupied the room on the first floor on the right. After the war the government sold the house to Lieutenant-Colonel C. R. Randle, yet Delmer regularly visited the house up until his death in September 1979.

With the phenomenal popularity of wireless in the 1920s, both the British and German national broadcasting bodies constructed purpose-built headquarters at the beginning of the 1930s. The Rundfunkhaus *(left)* was opened on Masurenallee in Berlin in 1930, and Broadcasting House *(right)* in 1932 in Portland Place, London, by the BBC. On September 27, 1938, the BBC began its foreign language service when Neville Chamberlain's speech on the eve of Munich was broadcast in French, German and Italian. With the coming of war, the BBC sought to provide 'plentiful and accurate news' and 'unfailing truthfulness' as the cornerstone of its 'white' propaganda against Germany.

Johannes Reinholz was the scriptwriter. A professional journalist married to a Jewess, who had managed to escape from Germany at the eleventh hour in August 1939.

Max Braun was also a refugee from Germany, an anti-Nazi Socialist politician, who was used by Delmer as a translator of German newspapers. It was with Braun that Delmer deviated from the rule concerning cover names and made a serious error. Given the cover name 'Albert Simon', Braun appeared at breakfast on his first morning at RAG wearing a dressing gown emblazoned with his 'MB' monogram. Reinholz, who had thought he had recognised him earlier, immediately blew his cover and Delmer, who now had to call Braun by his real name, took care not to make the same mistake again.

Paul Sanders was a writer of detective stories from Berlin who had reached England in 1938. While a corporal in the Pioneer Corps, he volunteered for special duties and as a result of his interviews was passed on to Delmer for consideration. The tone of his voice, his accent, and the way he spoke were perfect for what Delmer had in mind, and Paul Sanders became 'Der Chef'.

On May 23, 1941, Delmer and Sanders travelled by car to 'Simpson's' to record the first broadcast for Gustav Siegfried Eins. The recording was then taken to Potsgrove from where it was transmitted on two frequencies for ten minute periods between the hours of 1253 and 2353. The same recording and transmitting procedure was followed every day.

As it was intended to give the impression that GS1 had been in existence for some time there was no special introduction; 'Der Chef' simply launched into what was to become a daily routine always using the same format. He would begin each transmission with a series of coded messages for various other, equally fictitious, GS stations. 'GS1 calling GS23' he would announce, read that station's message, and then call GS9 or GS12 or any other number that came into his head.

The messages relayed by 'Der Chef' were in a simple numeric code that could easily be broken. Delmer knew that the radio monitors of the Reich Central Security Office, the Reichssicherheitshauptamt (RSHA), would quickly track the location of the station to England and so every group of numbers translated into a simple message similar to those broadcast to the French Resistance after the BBC news at 9.00 p.m. Karl, for example, would be instructed to meet Rudolf outside the Union Cinema during the interval between performances. As the Union cinemas in Germany were as prolific as their Odeon counterparts in Britain, Delmer hoped that a large force of Gestapo agents would be out on the streets endeavouring to catch Karl and Rudolf red-handed at whatever it was they were supposed to be doing. Everything that Delmer did was designed to be disruptive.

'Der Chef' was pro-Hitler and anti-British. He referred to Winston Churchill as a 'flat-footed bastard of a drunken old Jew' and it was hoped that by doing so no German listener would ever believe that his broadcasts emanated from Britain. He was also anti-Semitic in a half-hearted sort of way and he was opposed to the French, the Russians and even the Italians. Every night he attacked high Nazi Party and SS officers. Until September 1942, he left Hitler alone, but Himmler, Goebbels, von Ribbentrop and 'Sepp' Dietrich frequently came in for

Germany's English language radio was begun by Wolff Mittler and Norman Baillie-Stewart *(left)* — the so-called 'Officer in the Tower'. (In 1933, having been charged with selling secrets to a Wehrmacht major, Second Lieutenant Baillie-Stewart had been held for some two months at the Tower of London pending his court-martial.) However, the broadcasts were quickly taken over by William Joyce *(right)* who had been an arch-supporter of fascism in Britain. Joyce joined the Reichsrundfunk service in September 1939, making his first broadcast to Britain on September 11. Within days, his haughty intonation had led reporter Sydney Smith to dub him 'Lord Haw-Haw', yet Joyce's introduction of 'Germany calling' made no secret of the origination of the transmissions. Joyce was also put in charge of a secret project to produce programmes made to sound as if they were broadcast from Britain. However, unlike the subtle 'black' variety put out by Delmer, Joyce wrote scripts which were designed to openly incite unrest. His announcers were turncoat British PoWs, yet few were accomplished broadcasters and the end result was 'grey' in the extreme.

their fair share of criticism. When he did include Hitler in his diatribe, 'Der Chef' was sympathetic and stated that the Führer was obviously being influenced by incompetent advisers. Generals of the old school such as von Rundstedt, Kesselring, Halder, von Kleist and von Bock were complimented but the popular Erwin Rommel was referred to contemptuously as a badly-trained, swashbuckling careerist. The most popular part of 'Der Chef's' broadcasts was his revelation of sensational 'inside' information and his detailed descriptions of the sexual deviations practised by members of the Nazi hierarchy.

'Der Chef's' first broadcast was 12 days after Deputy Führer Rudolf Hess had parachuted into Scotland and included in the programme was a list of suspected associates who were said to be under arrest. The names were real but the list was fictitious and Delmer was overjoyed when, several days later, German newspapers reported that some of the listed persons had actually been interrogated by the Gestapo.

Each broadcast ended with the words 'I shall repeat this broadcast, all being well, every hour at seven minutes to the hour', a deliberate suggestion that 'Der Chef' was taking a big risk and could well be arrested by the Gestapo himself.

Although the first recording was a little crude, it soon became very professional as 'Der Chef' gained confidence with experience and began to be involved with the scripts. Soon he began to attack local Party officials as well, telling of their black market dealings and other illicit activities. The information used by 'Der Chef' was true and was gathered from a number of sources. A file of names was compiled from German newspapers and magazines, conversations between PoWs were secretly recorded, and letters en route to the then-neutral USA were opened and read by censors. The best source was the Admiralty's Naval Intelligence Department. Admiral John Godfrey had set up a special propaganda section (NID17) to work with Delmer. Its chief was a Commander Donald McLachlan. (Godfrey's PA was Ian Fleming who used his experiences later when writing his famous James Bond novels.) Each of the names and addresses mentioned by 'Der Chef' was genuine. The accusations were not, but it was surprising to find how many of them turned out to be true.

After GS1 got into its stride, Delmer and his team waited with growing eagerness and anxiety for evidence of its reception. Known to the 'trade' as 'comeback', it was not long in coming, and when German newspapers reached Woburn, Delmer was delighted to find that they carried stories that had been broadcast by 'Der Chef'.

One such story concerned Robert Ley, the head of the Deutsche Arbeitsfront (German Labour Front) and the Kraft Durch Freude organisation (KdF; Strength through Joy). 'Der Chef' told his listeners that Ley was obtaining extra food rations under the counter for himself and his family. It was a complete fabrication but three days after the broadcast the story was told to his interrogators by a captured Luftwaffe officer. Shortly afterwards conclusive evidence appeared when Ley and Goebbels attempted to allay the rumour through the pages of the Party newspaper, *Der Angriff*. The seeds of doubt that Delmer was sowing in the minds of the German people were taking root.

After 18 months of operation, bigger and better plans for Delmer's talents were about to reach fruition, and Gustav Siegfried Eins came to an abrupt end. One night in October 1943 'Der Chef' had his dramatic swansong. Special sound effects were laid on for his last broadcast which ended when he was finally located by the Gestapo who burst in on him while seated at his microphone and gunned him to death. Play-acting, of course, but

Delmer, on the other hand, produced material which openly debased Britain and its leadership, using the most foul language, to convince listeners that they really had tuned in to a German programme. The leading character of Delmer's first station, Gustav Siegfried Eins, was 'Der Chef' — in reality Peter Seckelmann, known at Aspley Guise as 'Paul Sanders'. In 1987, Anglia Television traced Der Chef, then living in Switzerland, and brought him back to his old studio at Wavendon.

listeners were treated to guttural shouts of 'Schweinhund', the German equivalent of 'got you at last', and bursts of sub-machine gun fire.

However, it must be remembered that 'Der Chef's' broadcasts were recorded and repeated at hourly intervals. The engineers at Potsgrove did not understand German and they had not been told of the significance of the final recording. Consequently, one hour after the 'death' of 'Der Chef', Delmer was horrified to hear a replay of the whole dramatic performance! What he said to those concerned is not recorded nor is there any evidence that listeners in Germany heard the same broadcast twice.

Report on Black Propaganda.. .....
4 - 10th July, 1942.

MOST SECRET

A. Broadcasts.

1. G.S.1. The main objects this week have been:

To demoralise U-boat crews. (Story of Spaniards' visit to Germany and their reports on the U-boats being repaired in Spain.)

To foster hatred of Party officials. (Story of Ley's visit to Stuelpnagel in Paris in company with a disreputable woman.)

To increase fears about children sent to Hungary from Germany. (Story of outbreak of infantile paralysis in Hungary, and of nurses despatched from the Russian front to deal with it.)

To attract listeners, Delmer used the crude formula of the tabloid press — sex. Pornography on the air was unheard of at the time, and Delmer pandered to the ordinary front-line soldier with a fund of dirty stories with the sole aim of making GS1 known. Once he had his captive audience, Delmer cleverly twisted fact and fiction to start rumour and sow discontent; not openly, but in such a way as to make his audience ask awkward questions. Although GS1 suffered the constraints of only being able to broadcast on the short-wave, and was only able to use recorded speech, evidence soon emerged of the effectiveness of Delmer's methods. In September 1941 the US Embassy in Berlin reported to Washington: 'The illegal broadcasting station Siegfried 1, supposedly transmitting inside Germany, operates daily on the 31.5-metre band, taking to the air at 7 minutes to the hour. Using violent and unbelievably obscene language, this station criticises the actions of the Party and certain Party-favoured officers, especially the SS. . . . A very large number of Germans listen to this station, and often names, dates and addresses are given in such detail that it may be assumed that the statements could be quickly discredited if no background existed.'

MOST SECRET 20th September, 1941.

To: Mr. Kirkpatrick.

From: Mr. Delmer.

Mr. Crossman instructed me to get in touch with you to discuss the possibility of BBC interference with German home programmes. Both Mr. Crossman and I take the view that the mere butting in of a heckler serves no purpose. What we would suggest is the introduction on German wavelengths of fake German matter calculated to have a subversive effect. This fake matter would sound like the genuine items of the German radio programme. I will give some examples:

1) I would suggest recording immediately a fanfare announcement by the OKW of the German capture of Moscow, the surrender of Stalin and the cessation of hostilities (text enclosed). This would have a boomerang effect when it turned out not to be true.

2) Record from German transmission the introduction of a German Frontbericht. Then when the Frontberichter's voice should be heard, introduce a fake description of conditions at the German front, given by one of our own voices.

3) Record from German transmission the introduction to a lecture by some air or naval expert. The expert is then provided by us. He makes a speech roughly as follows: "I shall be very glad to tell you all I can and to answer all your questions, but before we begin I should like to say that the report issued by the OKW announcing the death in battle of ..... is not true, (voice quickens up) he was killed by the

- 2 -

same murderous hand that struck down from behind our comrade General von Fritzsch...." At that point the broadcast is dramatically interrupted and either there is no continuation at all or the fake announcer says: "We shall now play gramophone records."

4) The Germans have a Forces Programme, sending messages from relatives to their soldiers at the front and at sea. We could record from transmission one or two items of this and add a harrowing item of our own at the end of it (bombed mother speaking to her son). This could either be added to the end of a normal German transmission of this kind (we should have to study the times here very carefully) or, and this is the process that I recommend for the other transmissions, it should be broadcast on the wavelength of a station that has closed down for the night and simultaneously on a short-wave wavelength close to that used by the Deutschlandsender. Obviously the thing needs careful working out with technicians.

I can see that the objection that will be raised to the scheme is no doubt that the Germans can do this better than we can as they have more transmitters at their disposal. My view is that if the Germans want to do this, they will do it regardless of what we do to them. We cannot appease them on the air any more than we can on other fronts, and with the butting-in from Moscow and Berlin, total radio war has begun. Therefore we might as well show them what total radio war can really be. I am sure we can do better than they.

D.J.D

This is just a rough sketch. Could I come and discuss it with you?

D.J.D.

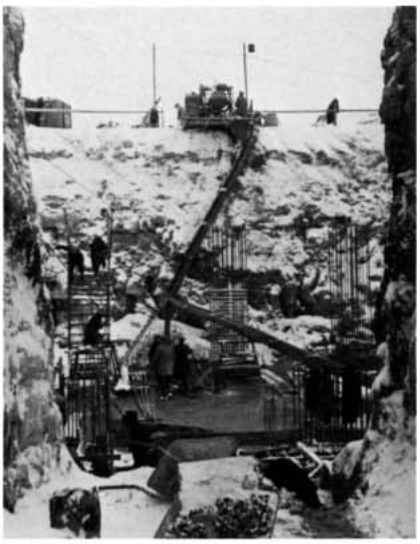
Sefton Delmer proposed a further development to actually break into existing German stations. This nice contemporary memo is to Ivone Kirkpatrick who represented the European Service at the BBC for the Political Warfare Executive. He sent it on to Bruce Lockhart of the PWE. However, having captured many powerful transmitters on the Continent, Germany was pre-eminently powerful in the ether, controllng a large number of wavelengths. Thus far, the Germans had refrained from jamming the BBC, but Kirkpatrick warned that such a scheme might well provoke all-out radio warfare.

Unknown to Delmer at the time, exactly one week before 'Der Chef' recorded his first broadcast for Gustav Seigfried Eins in 1941, a plan for a far more complex 'black propaganda' radio operation was submitted to Winston Churchill and approved by him the following day. The plan originated when Hugh Dalton and Anthony Eden visited the studios at 'Simpson's'. Eden was impressed by what he saw and asked if there was any way in which the output of the unit could be greatly increased. Harold Robin replied that all that was needed was a transmitter of much greater power.

The plan involved broadcasting on German wavelengths and was one that had interested the Prime Minister for some time, hence his speedy approval. (He simply said 'Pray proceed'.) It had originated in SO1 and was developed under the guidance of the three ministerial heads of PWE: Anthony Eden (Foreign Office), Hugh Dalton (Ministry of Economic Warfare), and Brendan Bracken (Ministry of Information).

Colonel Richard Gambier-Parry, the head of Section VIII, the SIS communications department, had heard of an eminently suitable transmitter in the United States. He sent Robin to see the manufacturer's United Kingdom sales manager and then submitted his purchase proposal. The 500 kilowatt medium wave monster was the highest powered transmitter in the world. It had been built for station WJZ in New Jersey but its intended use had been vetoed by the Federal broadcasting authority because it exceeded the maximum limit of 50 kw laid down for commercial radio stations. The equipment was inspected and an option for its purchase taken out on behalf of the British government. When approved by Churchill the transmitter passed into the hands of PWE at a cost estimated to be in the region of £165,000 including the cost of improvements and modifications. Being the most powerful transmitter in the world, it

The qualities for radio 'counter-battery' were summed up in a secret document dated November 24, 1941 as 'surprise, great strength (it must be louder in the countries to which it is directed than the enemy-controlled transmitters themselves) and flexibility'. The transmitter would have to be at least 500 kW and be able to range over the whole of the medium wave band. As no such equipment was available in Britain, Harold Robin was sent to the USA where it was known that a suitable transmitter was available. Initially, it was proposed that the new station, code-named 'Aspidistra', should be sited in the Woburn area, but Robin advised that, to get the best performance, the aerials would have to be located much nearer the coast. As the Air Ministry also objected to the siting of 300-foot masts in this corner of Bedfordshire, close to many active aerodromes, Robin eventually settled on a 70-acre site on high ground in the Ashdown Forest near Crowborough, Sussex. As the equipment was to be sited underground, work began to excavate a massive pit early in 1942. The transmitter building can be seen taking shape in the centre with work on the power house further advanced at the top right.



The early construction phase coincided with bitterly cold weather and brazier fires had to be kept burning 24 hours a day to provide a modicum of heat for the frozen workmen. Here the foundations are being laid for the transmitter bunker. All pictures from Harold Robin's personal collection.

was promptly code-named 'Aspidistra' in reference to the song made popular by Gracie Fields.

Harold Robin was sent to the USA in the summer of 1941 and spent two months at the RCA factory at Camden, New Jersey, familiarising himself with 'Aspidistra'. Robin was a radio 'wizard'. The son of an inventor, he did his early groundwork in his father's factory and soon developed a natural flair for radio. He cultivated this flair at school at Oundle and at university and then found employment in factories making wireless sets. At Philco, the sales manager was Richard Gambier-Parry who later was responsible for Robin's entry into clandestine radio work in late 1939.

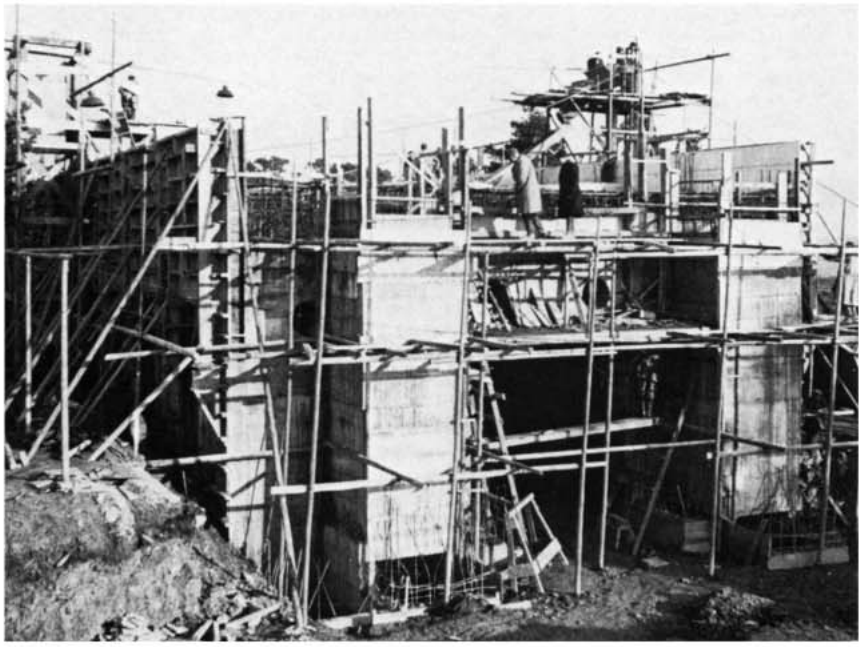
When Robin arrived at Camden two of the three parts of the transmitter were complete, and Robin supervised the building of the third part which increased the power to 600 kw. He also modified the design so that the three parts operated in parallel. The three masts and the aerials were designed by G. H. Brown, an American antenna expert. The masts were 300 feet in height and were designed to stand on 25-foot pedestals. The completed transmitter and its masts were shipped to Britain in several consignments aboard ships of the Royal Navy. The vessel carrying the aerial masts was torpedoed and a duplicate set had to be built and shipped at a later date.

Naturally enough, 'Aspidistra' was scheduled to become a part of the PWE broadcasting 'empire' in Bedfordshire. A large new studio complex was built in the tiny village of Milton Bryan, just inside the boundary fence of Woburn Park and a convenient mile or so from the Abbey. 'Aspidistra' was to be sited in Bedfordshire too, in a disused gravel quarry, but Harold Robin insisted that the location must be as close to Europe as possible. Several sites in Sussex were suggested but one after another they were turned down when objections were raised by either the Air Ministry (the height of the aerial masts would be a danger to low-flying aircraft) or the BBC (the transmitter would interfere with research work on secret RAF equipment). Finally, in exasperation, a meeting that was attended by representatives of the Home Office, Post Office, Air Ministry, BBC and other interested parties was called in Whitehall. The delegates were confronted by a large map of Sussex on which all of the proposed sites were marked. Each was discussed and marked off when an objection was raised until a site to which no-one present objected was selected in Ashdown Forest. The site was at King's Standing, near Crowborough, 620 feet above sea level and the highest point in the Forest. It was public land and this time the conservators of the forest objected, but when threatened with a requisition order they gave way.

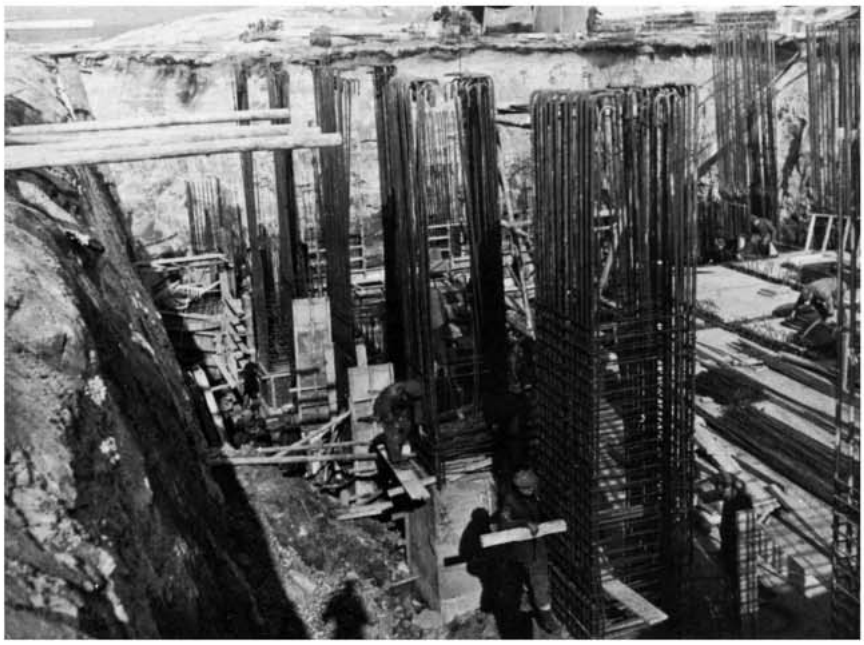
'Aspidistra' was to be housed underground. Some 70 acres of land were fenced and a large hole 50 feet deep was excavated by a Canadian Army road-building unit which happened to be billeted nearby, waiting, so the commanding officer said, for the invasion of Europe! The hole was roofed with bomb-proof reinforced concrete four feet thick. The concrete and steel were put in place by a civilian labour force 600 strong which worked 24 hours a day until the job was completed. Floodlights were used at night and only extinguished when there was warning of an air raid. The site took three weeks to excavate and the transmitter complex was completed in just nine months from the date of approval by Churchill. The construction and the installation of 'Aspidistra' was supervised by Robin assisted by Cecil Williamson whose pre-war employment in the British film industry was said to have influenced the interior decor.

While the site for 'Aspidistra' was under construction, a number of further objections to its use were raised by the BBC which now revealed that it was engaged in research with jamming apparatus that could be installed in RAF bombers. The BBC said that if transmissions started then the BBC would be bombed in retaliation. Heated discussions took place and eventually, as PWE had not actually worked out what it would do with its new transmitter, agreement was reached that 'Aspidistra' would be used to supplement the BBC's overseas broadcasts. 'Aspidistra' was ready for broadcasting in early 1942 but was not used until November 8 when it came on air to support the 'Torch' landings in North Africa with a broadcast by Roosevelt. This was recorded in the Oval Office by his nephew — an amateur — on an 8-inch disc which was duplicated in great secrecy at Wavendon Tower. Delmer must have known about it but he claimed that a use for the transmitter did not occur to him until one month later, just before Christmas 1942 when he was taken to lunch by Donald McLachlan.

McLachlan's chief, Rear-Admiral John



The power house was half underground, with a 4-foot-thick reinforced concrete roof above which was sited a 3-foot-deep water tank.



As the bunker to house the transmitting equipment was to comprise two floors, this meant that the lower level would be some fifty feet below ground.

Godfrey, had had a shore posting in Germany in 1936. While there he became aware of differences in German political opinions and of a rift between U-Boat ratings and their officers. In 1942, as Director of Naval Intelligence, he had the foresight and imagination to realise that one of the best ways in which the U-Boat menace could be overcome was to widen this rift which, on the evidence of the German Navy's mutiny at Kiel during the previous war, would quickly spread to the Army and the Luftwaffe. It was with this in mind that Godfrey had set up a special propaganda section, NID17z, which had been working with Delmer for some time. Now, through Donald McLachlan at the Christmas lunch, he put forward a plan for the development of his idea and suggested that Delmer open a new radio station that was to be aimed specifically at the U-Boat crews.

At the time, Delmer was unhappy with his work and its results to date. Godfrey's proposition appealed to him immensely but he realised that the present system of recording broadcasts for later transmission would not be good enough for the new station: programmes would have to go out live. In his book, *Black Boomerang*, Sefton Delmer states how at this point he 'suddenly remembered' that there was a vacant studio at Milton Bryan, a recollection that prompted him to tell McLachlan that he could put a new station on air provided that he could obtain the use of 'Aspidistra'. This account is repeated by Ellic Howe in his own and later book, but it is, in fact, incorrect. One can only assume that Delmer, as a top flight journalist, thought that his book version made a better story.

Harold Robin was involved from the very beginning and knows the true story. In a recorded interview in 1982, and later in a letter written in February 1990, Robin states that the Milton Bryan complex was built specially for Delmer's programme. After discussions with Delmer the accommodation was laid out by Robin and Squadron Leader Ted (later Sir Edward) Halliday. It was constructed by the Ministry of Works using direct labour and Robin with his staff installed the wiring and recording equipment for the studios. It follows that 'Aspidistra' was purchased for Delmer's use, despite the delay, and that he knew about it and the plan for the new station much earlier than he admits in his book.

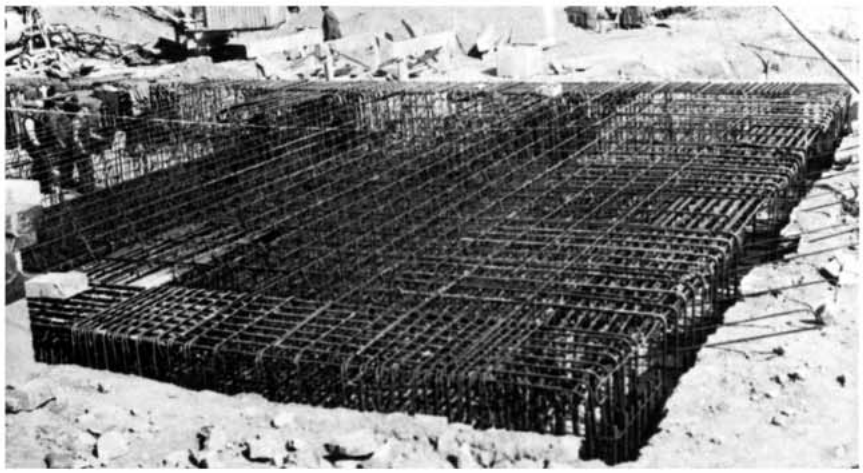
According to Delmer, he put the revolutionary plan to his new chief, Sir Robert Bruce Lockhart, who had now succeeded Reginald Leeper. Lockhart was very interested but was afraid that a great deal of influence would be necessary to prise 'Aspidistra' from the hands of the BBC. How that influence was obtained is not recorded, but among those whose assistance was sought were Major-General Dallas Brooks of the Royal Marines and Delmer's departmental Deputy Director-General in charge of inter-Service relations, and Charles Lambe, the Deputy Director of Plans at the Admiralty. No doubt Churchill also had a hand in it. Whatever went on at top level, 'Aspidistra' was removed from BBC use and control and Delmer and his team took possession of Milton Bryan (MB) in January 1943.

The MB studio complex was five acres in area. The main building was of two storeys and built of red brick and stood in the centre of a compound sited just off the road that runs through the village's Church End. The compound was surrounded by a 12-foot high, steel-mesh fence which was patrolled by Special Constables with Alsatian dogs. These security guards were retired members of the Bedfordshire Constabulary and were responsible to the PWE Security Officer at Woburn Abbey, Colonel Chambers.

The guards were employed to keep unauthorised persons out rather than to keep the mainly German inmates in, although, because of the identity of some of the inmates and also the effectiveness of the station's transmissions, there was always the threat of direct retaliation in that an attack might be staged by German commandos. In the event of this possibility, the guardroom contained an armoury of rifles and sub-machine guns. There was a firing range within the compound and the sound of staccato bursts of fire must have puzzled the villagers.

The MB studios were the most modern of their time and its telephone operators had years of previous experience with the GPO in London. Scrambler telephones stood on the desks of the senior staff and there were direct telephone lines to the BBC and the Air Ministry. The Hell-schreiber news service was taken direct from Germany and there were additional landlines to Reuters and the Press Association and to the PoW interrogation centres. The latter were at Latimer and Wilton Park in Buckinghamshire *(see After the Battle No. 70)* and when Delmer learned of a prisoner who could be useful, he would drive down immediately.

The delay in Delmer's use of 'Aspidistra', largely due to the objections from the BBC who were afraid that the Germans might retaliate either by jamming its broadcasts or bombing its headquarters at Broadcasting House in Portland Place. These objections had now been overruled and Delmer was ready.



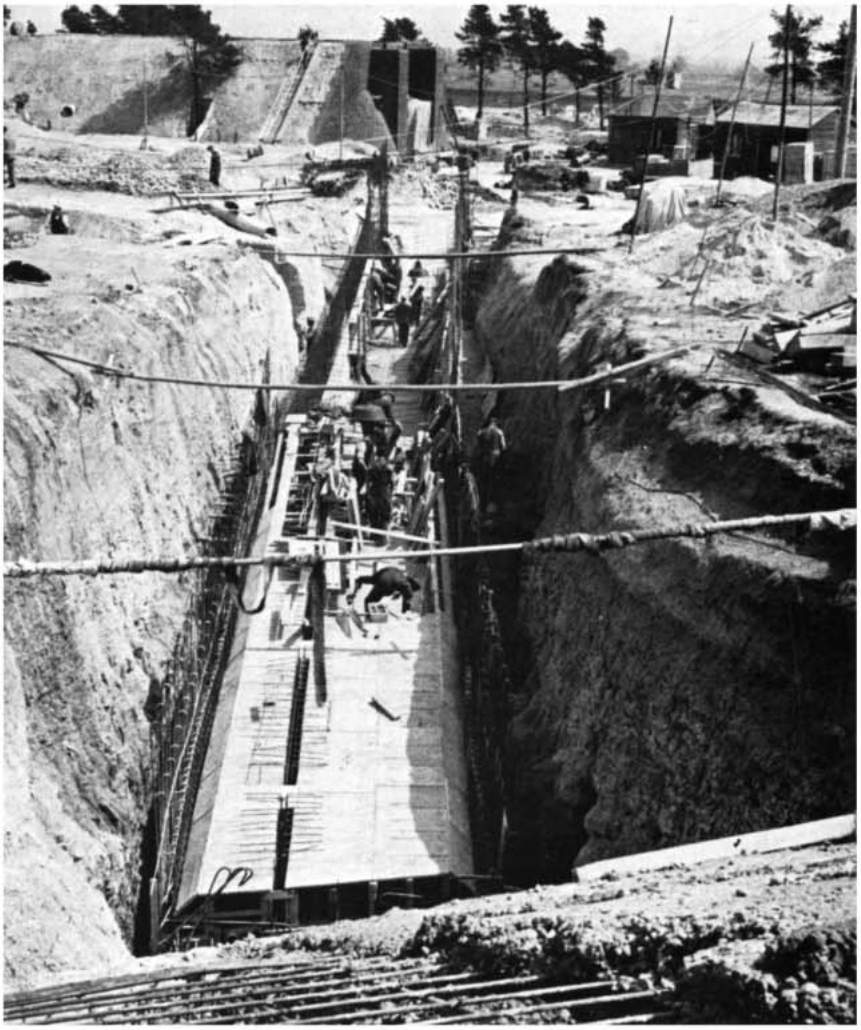
Left: **The roof involved a mass of reinforcing as it had to withstand a direct hit from a 1,000lb bomb.** *Right:* **Just before pouring the 5-foot-thick concrete slab.**

The name chosen for the new station was 'Deutsche Kurzwellensender Atlantik', the English translation of which was 'German Short-wave Radio Atlantic'. The Germans soon abbreviated the name to 'Atlantiksender'.

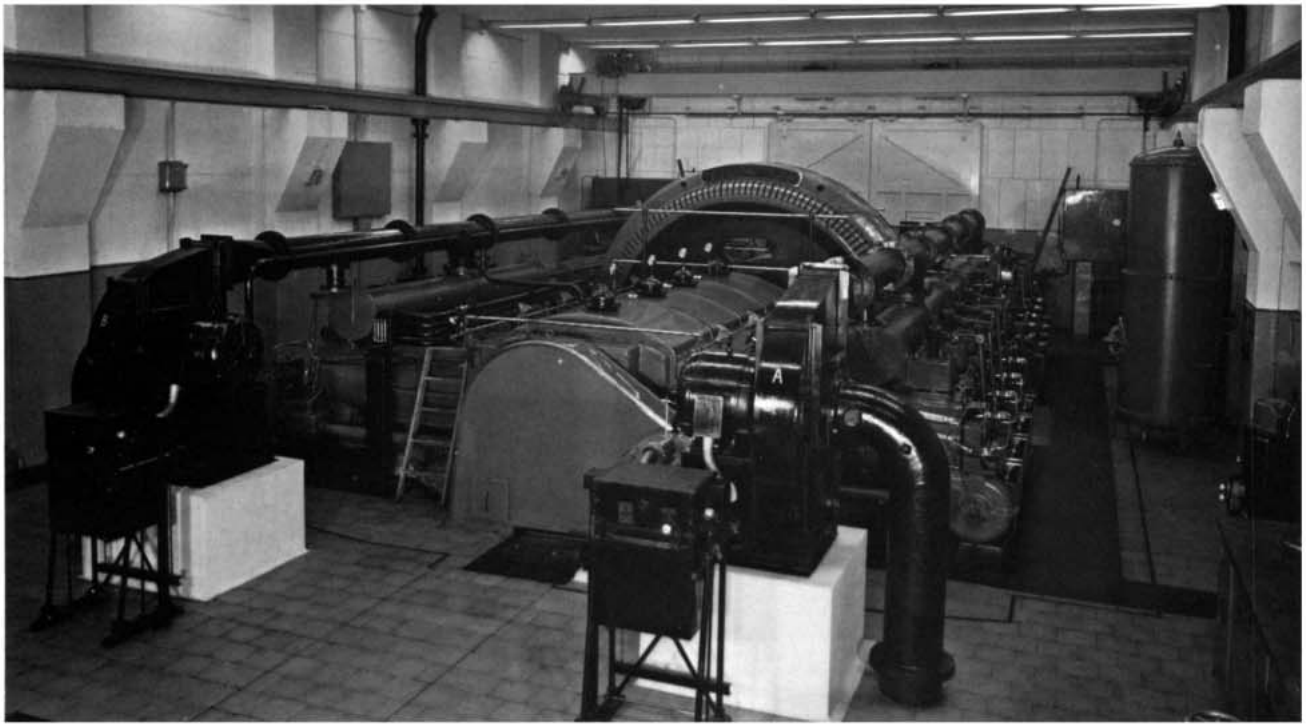
Although Delmer had increased the size of his original team during the 18 months that Gustav Siegfried Eins had been in existence, he needed a considerable number of extra personnel for the Atlantiksender operation, and by the end of the war there was a total of around a hundred people working at MB. Very few of these were English but two who were British nationals were Delmer's right-hand men.

Clifton Child was a 30-year-old education officer from Manchester and fluent in the German language. He joined the army when war was declared and was a specialist corporal in the Royal Corps of Signals when, having just published a book on the subject of Germans in the USA during the First World War, he was posted to the Political Intelligence Department of the Foreign Office where he worked with Dr John Hawgood on the preparation of both the German and American sections of the FO's Weekly Intelligence Summary. In March 1943, when the PID was merged with a unit of Chatham House to become the Foreign Office Research Department, Hawgood recommended Child to Delmer and secured the necessary Army and Foreign Office approval for his transfer to MB where he became Chief Intelligence Officer (Political). Clifton Child spent much of his time poring over German newspapers and intelligence reports and he had an uncanny flair for drawing the correct conclusion from the most vague and apparently unrelated news items. So good was he that Delmer was sometimes suspected by the SIS of having a 'mole' at Bletchley Park supplying secret 'Ultra' decrypts.

Child's opposite number at MB, the Chief Intelligence Officer (Economic) was C. E. Stevens, a Fellow of Magdalen College, Oxford, and an ancient history don. He came from the Ministry of Economic Warfare and among his accomplishments were a photographic memory and the suggestion that the



An underground tunnel linked the transmitter building (in the foreground having its roof concreted) with the power station beyond which is nearing completion surrounded by blast ramparts.



Electricity was generated by a 3,000hp 16-cylinder Crossley Premier engine. This ran for a total of 145,000 hours until outside power was brought in from the National Grid. This is the view from the supercharger end.

beginning of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, which sounded like the Morse code letter 'V', should be used to introduce the BBC broadcasts to the Resistance in Occupied Europe that followed the news every night.

Delmer's deputy was Karl Robson, an Army major, and a fellow journalist from the *News Chronicle* who spoke German as well as he spoke English.

Another Englishman who played a key rôle was Ellic Howe whose 'fakes and forgeries' propaganda printing unit is a story in itself (which he has recounted in his book *The Black Game*). Howe was the only British national to use a cover name, probably for business reasons. Delmer called him 'Armin Hull' which was another unexplained departure from using correct initial letters.

The great majority of the personnel who worked behind the steel mesh fence at MB were German, some of whom had held prominent positions before the war. Max Braun, who blew his own cover on his first morning at RAG, had led the anti-Nazi campaign in the Saar before the plebiscite of January 1935. Philip Rosenthal was a well-known manufacturer of porcelain who became the Social Democrat Social Services Minister in Bonn when Willi Brandt was Federal Chancellor after the war. Rene Halkett was a nephew of a former C-in-C of the German Army, the unfortunate General Werner von Fritsch, and Dr Ernst Adam had been Chief of Staff to the Republican C-in-C during the Spanish Civil War. Fritz Heine had been secretary of the Social Democrat Party until it was disbanded by the Nazis in May 1933, and later on there was Dr Otto John (cover name 'Oskar Jurgens'), a German Resistance leader and possibly the only one of the 1944 July Plot planners who managed to escape, becoming head of the post-war German equivalent of the British Secret Intelligence Service (SIS) until he fell foul of Reinhard Gehlen, West Germany's renowned spymaster.

There were some refugees and some deserters, but the rest of the staff were prisoners from the German armed forces — the Army, the Luftwaffe, and the U-Boat arm of the Kriegsmarine.

Exactly how these prisoners ended up at MB is not quite clear. It has already been mentioned that there was a direct telephone line to the PoW interrogation centres in Buckinghamshire and at that time the Foreign Office had a temporary Prisoner-of-War Department headed by Colonel Henry Faulk, a German-speaking psychologist. It must be assumed that likely candidates from these two sources were passed on to Delmer and it is known that PoW interrogation was also conducted at Woburn Abbey by, among others, actor Marius Goring.

One of the most intriguing of the prisoners was a U-Boat Oberfunkmeister (Chief Petty Officer wireless operator) by the name of Eddie Mander. Although a fanatical Nazi when he joined the Navy, his treatment by his superiors turned him, and he willingly used his extensive talents to help destroy his former masters.

Mander had been the Chief Radio Officer on the prison ship *Altmark* and, although badly wounded with a bullet in one lung, he evaded the boarding party from HMS *Cossack* by jumping overboard and escaping across the ice. After spending some time in hospital he was called up for the Kriegsmarine and insult was added to injury when he was required to do his radio training again from the very beginning. He made nine operational cruises before being arrested and court-martialled for 'black market' offences. Finding him guilty, the court took the unusual step of giving him the choice of three sentences. Mander took what he thought was the lesser of three evils, returned to operational U-Boats, and was captured when his boat was sunk a few days out from St Nazaire. Mander became the leading script-writer for the Atlantiksender. He was repatriated to Germany after the war and was murdered shortly afterwards, possibly by former U-Boat crewmen in an act of vengeance.

However, all during the construction and installation phase, the BBC raised strong objections to the immensely powerful Aspidistra being used to broadcast on enemy wavelengths. They saw this as a form of jamming which the War Cabinet had forbidden, as a tit-for-tat assault on Reichsender would lead to the BBC coming off worst. It was finally resolved in May 1942 that Aspidistra would be used by the BBC's European Service, now located at Bush House *(above)* on Aldwych, the same building to which the PWE's headquarters had moved from Woburn Abbey earlier that year.

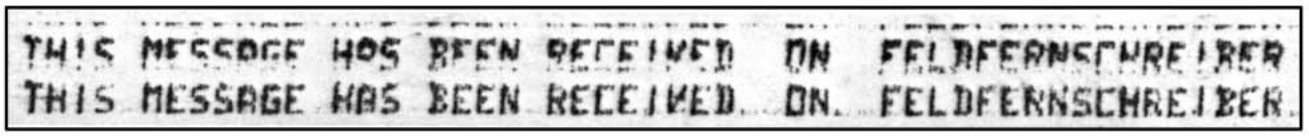
To Delmer, Mander was invaluable due to his hatred for the Nazis, his knowledge of German radio and radar equipment and techniques, the U-Boat code-book that he brought with him, and his personal knowledge of the U-Boat men and their private lives.

The Atlantiksender was based on Gustav Siegfried Eins but was very different in certain essentials. Unlike the earlier station, it purported to be a genuine German forces station. There were no obscenities or lurid stories and the broadcasts were basically a mixture of music and news: the music to make it contemporary and popular, the news to give credibility and to provide the vehicle for 'black' propaganda.

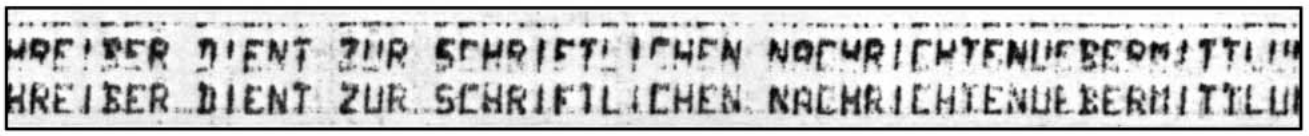
Initially, the station broadcast for three hours daily from 8.00 p.m. to 11.00 p.m. Later, when it was linked with another Delmer station, the Atlantiksender increased its hours and later still the twin stations were broadcasting 24 hours a day.

The British Embassy in Stockholm acquired recordings of the latest German 'top ten' which were flown to England by RAF Mosquito aircraft, while the American Office of Strategic Services (OSS) obtained records of the latest hit tunes from the USA. The OSS also arranged a special recording session by Marlene Dietrich, leading her to believe that she was doing it for the Voice of America station. Some records for Delmer were made in the Royal Albert Hall by the

On November 8, 1942, Aspidistra went on the air for the first time, putting out pre-recorded speeches by President Roosevelt and General Eisenhower on the American landings in North Africa. However, the first broadcast backfired because no one had been informed that the wavelength to be used would be that of the Vichy-controlled radio in Rabat. Consequently, it led the Admiralty to presume that the city had already been captured and was in American hands! This is the control room in 1942.



Although Aspidistra was not yet in Delmer's hands, one acquisition which was proving of inestimable value was a German radio-operated teleprinter called a Hell-schreiber. Goebbels had set up a network of the machines so that the German press agency — Deutsche Nachrichtenbüro or DNB — could service all its occupied territories without resorting to land lines. When its London office had closed, the DNB correspondent had left the machine behind and Delmer requisitioned it for his own use. This enabled him to intercept press releases as soon as they were sent out from Berlin. It gave Delmer unrivalled access to current news and events, sports reports and the like, which helped to make his own broadcasts sound all the more authentic, while still distorting the truth in his own inimitable way. 'And', wrote Delmer after the war, 'being faster workers and less inhibited than the teams working for Goebbels, we were able to put his news on the air before our Nazi competitors.' Although we were unable to trace a working Hell-schreiber, Hans Evers of Cerisiers, France, sent us these examples actually sent on the Wehrmacht version, the Feldfernschreiber. The tapes are reproduced same-size.



Band of the Royal Marines, and the crowning musical touch was a genuine German band which recorded for Delmer at MB after its capture in North Africa where it had been entertaining the Afrika Korps.

It was essential that the news items were genuine and topical and a variety of sources were used to ensure that they were right up to date.

The primary source was the interrogation of prisoners-of-war who provided up-to-the-minute details of military intelligence, gossip, troop movements and other items that could be used for subversive purposes.

Two members of the MB staff were employed in reading all the letters written by U-Boat PoWs as well as the births, marriages, and deaths notices published in German newspapers. With these they started what became an enormous reference file from which the Atlantiksender was able to offer congratulations to a U-boat commander on the birth of a baby or its sympathy to a Torpedomaat on the death of his father.

Reconnaissance photographs of German cities were taken by Mosquitos after bombing raids. The developed prints were taken by dispatch riders to MB where photo-interpreters in Clifton Child's team examined them. After comparison with a library of guide books and large-scale city plans, the Atlantiksender was able to announce the names of the streets and the actual numbers of the houses in them that had been destroyed just hours after the event.

Agents in the U-Boat bases in France kept a watch on local events and radioed the results of football matches between flotillas with the upshot that the Atlantiksender was able to broadcast the scores not long after the referee had blown the whistle for full time.

Congratulations on the award of military decorations were often broadcast before they had been officially announced, a seemingly astonishing feat that was actually performed relatively easily as the staff at MB knew the tonnage required for the Eisernes Kreuz (Iron Cross) and the scores of the individual U-Boats.

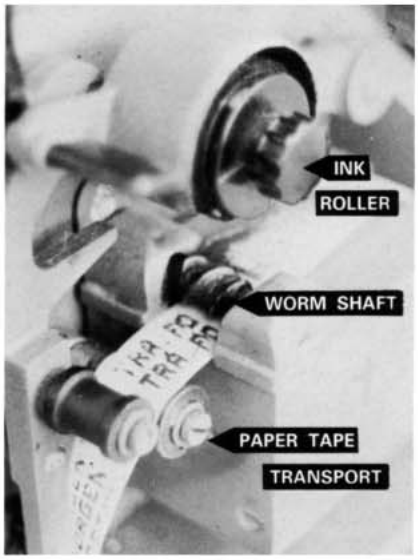
Despite these useful sources, the real key to the success of the Atlantiksender was Delmer's acquisition of a Hell-schreiber.

The Hell-schreiber (literal translation — bright or clear writer) was a teleprinter that printed by a scan across a paper tape. Dr Josef Goebbels, as head of the official German news bureau (the DNB), issued them to prominent newspapers and broadcasters, and through them the Reich propaganda ministry issued press releases and advanced texts of important speeches that were to be made by Hitler and other Party leaders, stating precisely which points should be emphasised and how editorial comment should treat them. When the London correspondent of the DNB returned to Germany after the outbreak of war he conveniently left behind his Hell-schreiber in full working order. Delmer acquired it through the generosity of the head of Reuters, Christopher Chancellor, had it copied in the United States, and installed a machine on every desk in the newsrooms at MB. The information sent out by Goebbels' Reichsministerium für Volksaufklärung und Propaganda was received at MB at exactly the same time as it was received by German newspaper offices and radio stations and *before it was released to the German people*. As Clifton Child commented, it takes little imagination to realise the potentialities of the Hell-schreiber machines in the hands of the 'black' propagandists at MB.

Delmer put the information received out on the Atlantiksender before the German stations did. Some items were repeated word-for-word to give an authentic touch to what was supposed to be an official German station, while others were given a good measure of disinformation that was never intended by the Herr Doktor Goebbels.

As the Atlantiksender was supposedly a German forces station, its news items were deliberately slanted so as to be of interest to Service personnel and were spoken in Service jargon. One of the objectives was to encourage surrender and desertion and this was done by suggestion. Much was made, for example, of how prisoners in enemy (Allied) hands would have an advantage after the war because they were being taught new crafts and were already being paid good wages, and a genuine International Red Cross report was repeated stating that there was a noticeable increase in the number of deserters reaching neutral countries and obtaining good jobs there. Prisoners-of-war in Canada and the United States were also reported to be working for high wages.

Other objectives were to unnerve and to mislead. On one occasion, when information was received from the Admiralty that a number of blockade runners were suspected



Above: **The transmitter section of the Feldfernschreiber. The coded drum turns one revolution per character, and every time a key is pressed, one turn of the drum produces a series of pulses. These pulses are recognised by the receiver** *(centre)* **and an electro-magnet taps the slowly-moving roll of paper tape against a fast-running inked worm shaft** *(right)*.

And so to MB — Milton Bryan — the nerve centre of Sefton Delmer's operations from February 1943. The purpose-built studio block was protected by a perimeter fence patrolled by armed guards with dogs. *Left:* **This picture was taken several years ago by Felix Delmer, but when we visited Milton Bryan in July 1991 we found that the fence had gone save for the odd post** *(right).* **Nevertheless, one can still follow the remains of the patrol path laid around the complex.**

of being about to sail for Japan, the Atlantiksender laid on a special programme of Japanese music for the ships to let the crews know that their destination was no longer a secret. On another occasion, the Admiralty supplied Delmer with details of a new and secret anti-radar device. It was actually a completely useless piece of equipment but the Atlantiksender managed to give the impression that it was causing grave concern to the Allies and caused the U-Boats to have the utmost faith in it.

As the war continued and 1943 gave way to 1944 the senior and experienced U-Boat commanders who had been either killed or captured were replaced by young men whose previous experience was limited to one or two cruises as watchkeeping officers. Aware of the gap that already existed between U-Boat officers and ratings, the Atlantiksender used the situation to drive the wedge deeper, suggesting that the drive for decorations and glory by the new, young, and inexperienced commanders would result in the loss of their boats and the deaths of their crews.

It is almost certain that Goebbels knew that his voice was being broadcast on the Atlantiksender! Using recordings of his speeches and the transcripts received through the Hell-schreiber, the Atlantiksender retransmitted them, but the commentary that followed immediately afterwards highlighted a very different interpretation from the one decreed by the Propaganda Minister.

When the Atlantiksender was ready to commence operations, negotiations for the transfer of 'Aspidistra' to Delmer had not been completed. The powerful transmitter was still in use by the BBC and when the first broadcast took place on February 5, 1943, the programme went out live on the short wave via the Potsgrove transmitter. As with the first broadcasts of Gustav Siegfried Eins, evidence of 'come-back' was eagerly awaited at MB and first reports began to be received very soon.

On the very first evening, Atlantiksender was detected by the alert monitors of Reichsmarschall Göring's radio security service which realised that the station was British and attempted to jam it. Despite the fact that its cover was blown within a few hours of its inaugural transmission, Germans continued to listen and a great many of them believed it. Reference to the Atlantiksender soon appeared in newspapers published in what neutral countries there were left in Europe but, more significantly, captured U-Boat men and aircrew from Luftwaffe units operating in support of the U-Boat bases in France told their interrogators that there was little point in refusing to answer questions because the Atlantiksender already knew the answers. Interrogation reports received from other theatres showed, for instance, that the station was extremely popular with the Afrika Korps.

Not long after the inauguration of the Atlantiksender, Delmer's horizons were considerably expanded when he was appointed Director of Special Operations against the Enemy and Satellites (Black). This new appointment meant that Delmer not only had Germany to consider but also her allies. Additional huts were erected in the compound at Milton Bryan and the number of personnel increased again with the influx of Italians, Bulgarians, Hungarians and Rumanians. A number of additional clandestine stations went on the air and it is a measure of Delmer's genius that he was able to plan and operate them all at the same time without compromising any one of them. Nearly all of these stations were ineffective and had short lives.

While Atlantiksender was aimed at the U-Boat arm of the Kriegsmarine, it was not long before Delmer was called upon to open a second major 'black' propaganda station directed at the other two arms of the Wehrmacht, the Heeres (the Army) and the Luftwaffe. The new station was called 'Soldatensender Calais' but, for obvious reasons, changed its name to 'Soldatensender West' after the Allied advance following the Normandy landings overran the Channel ports. The Soldatensender was linked with the Atlantiksender and also announced itself as such, but this time Delmer had the use of 'Aspidistra' and his new station blasted the air waves with 600 kw of power on medium wave. By this time, two 100 kw short wave transmitters had been added.

Initially, the Soldatensender broadcast for three hours daily from 8.00 p.m. until 11.00 p.m. but its hours were gradually increased until, when the planners of 'Overlord' required Delmer to undermine the morale of

The derelict guardroom still stands beside the main gate. Otto John described the scene in December 1944: 'Finally the car stopped before an iron grille behind which there was a door leading to a guardroom. Through the half-open door I could see men in uniform and sub-machine guns with their barrels gleaming against the wall.'

The move to MB coincided with the launch of Delmer's new station, Atlantiksender, but still only on the short-wave (30.7 and 48.3 metres) as Aspidistra had not yet been wrested from the clutches of the BBC. Nevertheless the new studio facilities freed Delmer from the constraints of recorded programmes, enabling him to go out live. This had its dangers for there was now a risk that the announcer might depart, either intentionally or by mistake, from the prepared script. Today the risk of obscene callers on 'phone-in programmes is taken care of by a slight delay in transmission, giving time for the offender to be cut off before his voice is heard, but such electronic sophistication was not available in 1943. Therefore each of the announcers in the studios at MB had a 'minder'; a man or woman, fluent in German, who sat on the opposite side of the desk with one hand holding a copy of the script and the other poised over a switch with which the broadcast could be cut off instantly should the announcer deviate from the text. *Left:* **This was demonstrated in the mock-up built by Anglia Television for their 1987 documentary *Woburn at War*.** *Right:* **Harold Robin who provided the authentic MB microphone and record cutter.**

the German forces in France, it was on the air for 24 hours a day.

Like its associate, the Soldatensender gave the impression that it was a German forces radio station based in the Pas de Calais area. Once again, its propaganda was subversive and not by direct appeal.

Its first transmission was on October 24, 1943, and there was plenty of popular music and much that was of interest to the ordinary German soldier in the way of sports results, promotions and decorations. A great deal of emphasis was laid upon the adverse progress of the war: the devastation caused by RAF and USAAF bombing, the misery experienced by the families at home, the disruption of transport and other services. New and fictitious Allied weapons against which there was no protection were reported and the inexorable advance of the Red Army towards the heart of the Fatherland was announced repeatedly and in great detail.

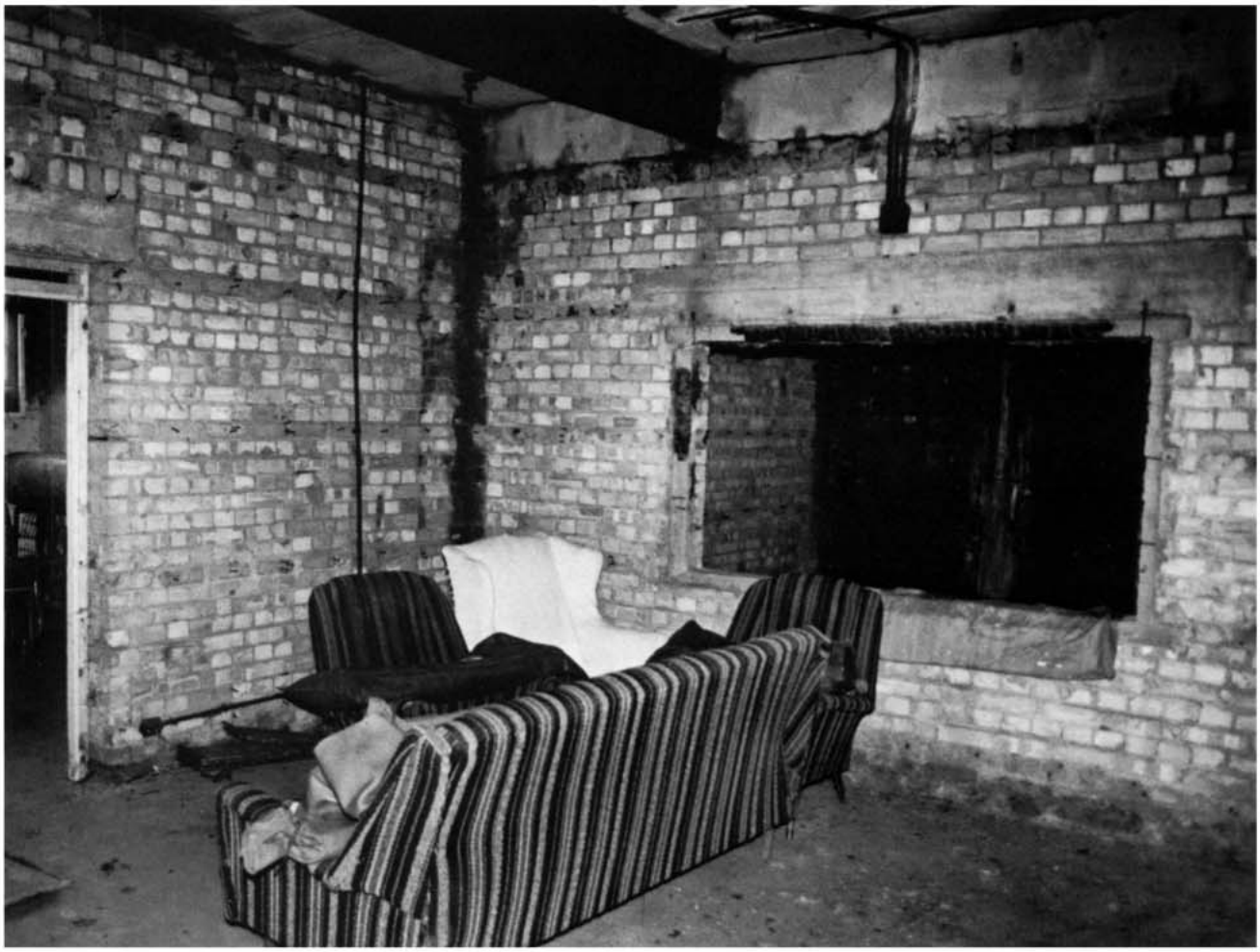
The Soldatensender, as a 'German' radio station, could make no direct appeal for surrender. Its constant message, though, by covert suggestion, was that the war was already lost and that there was little point in the armed forces continuing the struggle. It was cunning too. In denouncing deserters, the Soldatensender told loyal soldiers what signs to watch for among their comrades and in doing so surreptitiously gave instructions on how to desert and get away with it. Other methods of encouraging desertion were to report on the numbers of men reaching neutral territory and to announce that certain well-known and high-ranking officers had not been captured but had crossed the Allied lines of their own free will.

Strange though it may seem, it was the Soldatensender that gave the first announcement of the Normandy landings. This was no breach of secrecy but a carefully planned attempt to break down the morale of the defending German troops. Delmer had been in on the plans for 'Overlord' for some time so that his operation could be used with the utmost effect. As soon as the long-awaited news-flash was received from the DNB over the Hell-schreiber, the Soldatensender announcer broke into a music programme and broadcast his own prepared announcement. This took place at 4.50 a.m. on June 6. It was a simple statement that the invasion had begun but a short time later the same announcer at MB was back on the air with a longer report stating erroneously that the much-vaunted Atlantic Wall had already been breached by overwhelming Allied forces and that the coastal garrisons were surrounded.

Live radio permitted a 'disc jockey' style of presentation with an approach completely different from GS1. Now the accent was slick and fast, with the playing of much American 'pop' dance music never heard on the official German stations. News flashes, courtesy of the Hell-schreiber, were even read in a new form of colloquial German without the verb at the end of the sentence to make it short and punchy to hold listeners' attention. A German band, captured in North Africa, was employed to make special recordings for MB, as was Marlene Dietrich although she was led to believe that she was performing for Voice of America! 'Poor Marlene', wrote Delmer.

'She never learned the truth until she revisited her native Berlin after the war' where she was pelted with rotten tomatoes for performing on Nazi radio. The last programme from MB went out at 5.59 a.m. on Friday, April 30, 1945 when Soldatensender West signed off. Delmer made the final announcement — the only time he was ever heard personally on black radio. Milton Bryan was stripped of its equipment and abandoned, save for its period as a PoW camp when our author, Mark Kenyon, first knew it. By the 1980s it had been extensively vandalised — this is how Felix Delmer found it on a nostalgic visit to walk in his father's footsteps.

After remaining abandoned for many years, and then suffering the attention of vandals, didicois, and a fire, in 1985 the old studio complex was given to the Ampthill and Woburn District Scouts to be used as a combined camp-site and store.



November 28, 1943: Dr Josef Goebbels, the Third Reich's propaganda chief: 'The British are greatly over-estimating the damage done to Berlin. Naturally it is terrible, but there is no question of twenty-five per cent of the capital no longer existing. The English naturally want to furnish their public with a propaganda morsel. I have every reason to want them to believe this and therefore forbid any denial. The sooner London is convinced that there is nothing left of Berlin, the sooner they will stop their air offensive against the Reich capital. In the evening, the so-called Soldatensender Calais, which evidently originates in England and uses the same wavelength as Radio Deutschland when the latter is cut out during air raids, gave us something to worry about. The station does a very clever job of propaganda and from what is put on the air one can gather that the English know exactly what they have destroyed in Berlin and what they have not.' The broadcasts which so concerned 'Mr Propaganda' came from these rooms which now echo to the strains of the *Ging Gang Goolie* song.

The broadcasts of both the Atlantiksender and the Soldatensender were a continuous series of hoaxes but Delmer still had the ultimate hoax up his sleeve. What interested him most about 'Aspidistra' was the powerful transmitter's ability to change frequencies in seconds. It interested Churchill too, and the plan for the ultimate hoax, which Delmer referred to as his 'Big Bertha', had been approved in principle as early as December 1942, but had been vetoed on the almost unbelievable grounds that it was considered undesirable for the Germans to be able to claim after the war that part of the cause of their defeat was a propaganda trick. The BBC also objected, fearing that the Germans might either jam or bomb its own transmitters. It was not until shortly before the end of the war that Delmer's 'Big Bertha' was used and it came about quite by chance.

Churchill, staying at General Eisenhower's headquarters, read in the American forces newspaper, *Stars and Stripes*, that Allied military radio stations were instructing the German people to stay calm and to remain in their homes. Churchill was furious. He wanted the German people out on the roads, jamming the Army's movements, just as the French civilians had done to the British Army in 1940. He gave orders for immediate counter-instructions and sanctioned the use of 'Aspidistra'. At last, Delmer could fire his 'Big Bertha' and how he did so was clever in the extreme: the takeover of a German radio station.

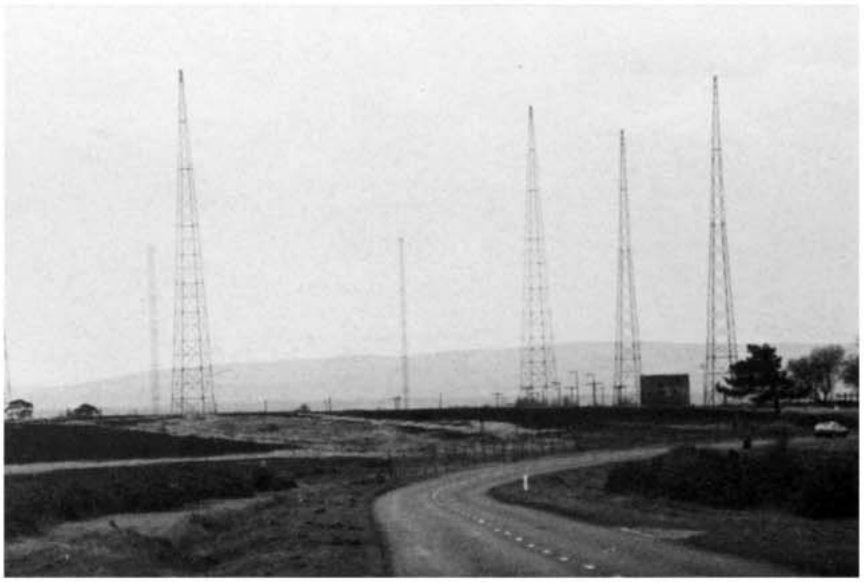
In Germany there was a single radio programme, the Reichsprogramm, that was relayed from Berlin by transmitters located in twelve key cities. It had been noticed that when an RAF raid was 50 miles distant from the target city the local transmitter went off the air so that its signal could not be used by the approaching bombers as a navigational aid. It was this knowledge and the capability of 'Aspidistra' that had given Delmer the idea for his ultimate hoax.

The Air Ministry co-operated and the RAF would inform Delmer at lunch-time that a raid on Hamburg was planned for the coming night and gave him the time that the bomber stream was expected to reach the target. On the night in question, half an hour or so before the stated time, the programme broadcasting from Hamburg would be picked up by the receivers at Milton Bryan and relayed by land-line to Crowborough. At the same time, MB would pick up the Frankfurt transmission and relay it on a second line to 'Aspidistra'. At the moment that Hamburg went off the air 'Aspidistra' relayed the Frankfurt transmission on the Hamburg frequency. The change was made in 6 milliseconds and the listening audience was completely unaware that the programme of music was not coming from the Hamburg transmitter. The team at MB continued with the music for a short time before fading it out for Delmer's specially prepared announcements. These never took more than two or three minutes and when completed the music was brought back, played for several minutes, and then faded out again for the approach of the RAF raid. When the raid was over, the genuine programme from Hamburg continued.

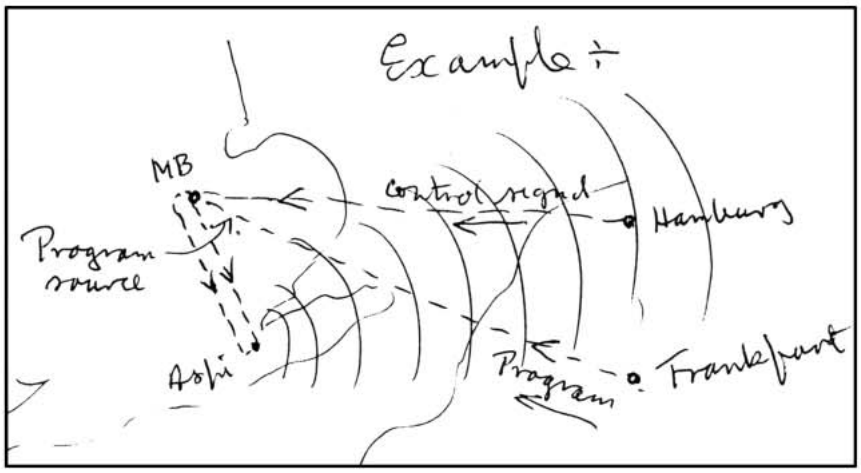
Delmer's announcements were designed to cause confusion. Residents of Hamburg might, for instance, be instructed to report to the railway station where special trains had been laid on for evacuation to another part of Germany, and people in another city might be told that special ration vouchers for those bombed out of their homes were available at a certain Government office.

The first target for this clever intruder operation was actually Cologne. During the preceding two weeks, recordings of Radio Cologne were taken from the library at MB and carefully studied. Cologne used a man and a woman for its announcements and Delmer replaced them with Moritz Wetzold, who had once been a trainee announcer, and Margit Maass who was an actress capable of imitating any voice. The text of the announcements was prepared by Clifton Child, C. E. Stevens and Hans Behrmann, and rehearsed by Wetzold and Margit Maass until they could copy perfectly the voices of the Cologne announcers.

On March 24, 1945, the RAF advised Delmer that Cologne was to be the target that night and that Radio Cologne could be expected to go off the air at 9.15 p.m. The operation was perfect. At 9.20 p.m. the programme being relayed from Berlin via 'Aspidistra' on the Cologne frequency was faded and Wetzold and Maass began their announcement. The Gauleiter, they said, had ordered people to leave their homes immediately, taking with them only essential possessions. The men should report for duty to defend their neighbourhoods against the approaching Allied advance but the women and children must walk to a specified evacuation centre. Local Nazi party officials were ordered to marshal the evacuees. According to reports captured after the end of the war, the hoax was completely successful. Frankfurt and Leipzig were the next two cities to be targeted and by the end of the war 'Aspidistra' had been used for 'Big Bertha' intruder operations on ten occasions.



By October 1943 the battle with the BBC for Aspidistra was finally won and Soldatensender Calais burst forth on 360, 410 and 492 metres. Harold Robin had been able to squeeze another 100 kW from the medium-wave transmitter — a massive 600 kW far exceeding any in Europe — with an ability to drown out any existing station. At the same time he had installed two 100 kW short-wave transmitters, giving much more power than the PWE had ever had before, and four 7½ kW transmitters. He even had a mobile half-kilowatt relay operating on the cliffs of Dover, opposite Calais, to help confuse the Germans if they tried to get a fix on the location of top secret Aspidistra. *Above:* **The original wartime aerials for Aspidistra were replaced by these short-wave antennae around 1950.**



The ultimate hoax was 'Big Bertha'. Harold Robin explains with the aid of his own rough sketch. 'MB receives two Reich radio programme signals: one from Hamburg, which goes off due to a raid by UK bombers, and the second from, say, Frankfurt. The latter stays on and will be relayed by Aspidistra now tuned up to Hamburg frequency (908 kcs) but not radiating because RF drive is held off. Hamburg goes off air, MB heterodyne tone to Aspi goes off, drive now comes on and Aspi radiates Reich programme as received from Frankfurt. Local people hear a short click of about six to eight milliseconds duration and Reich programme continues until MB fades it down and Delmer's announcer speaks up.' Thus, for the duration of the raid, MB was free to disseminate a variety of information to the population of Hamburg under attack designed to induce panic and distress.

LADIES

Mr Delmer

For information

Elliday

March 25/26, 1945.

ASPIDISTRA INTRUDER OPERATION ON 1195 kc/s (FRANKFURT)

Note: Reichssender Frankfurt was off the air before, during, and after the operation. Relays of the German home service programme were taken from Munich, Vienna, Leipzig, etc.

B.S.T.

20.43 Aspidistra goes on the air with relay.

20.48 First announcement: Approach of Allied armour, evacuation instructions.

20.51 Aspidistra off the air.

20.59 Aspidistra back with relay.

21.02 Second announcement: Repeat of first announcement for different town.

21.10 Third announcement: Instructions telling Red Cross workers to report for duty.

21.27 Fourth announcement: Armoured reconnaissance units in Ramstadt.

21.34½ Aspidistra carrier cut for 30 seconds. No trace of Frankfurt transmitter.

21.36 Fifth announcement: Report of armoured reconnaissance units.

21.44½ Aspidistra carrier cut for 30 seconds. No trace of Frankfurt transmitter.

22.23 Sixth announcement: Announcement about suspected enemy agents in German army car.

22.38 Seventh announcement: Repeat of previous announcement, No. 6.

22.52 Eighth announcement: Instruction to butchers in Kassel area.

22.53 Aspidistra carrier cut for 30 seconds. No trace of Frankfurt transmitter.

23.04 Ninth announcement: Appeal for handcarts, etc.

23.14½ Tenth announcement: Air raid situation report. Kurhessen area.

23.16 Eleventh announcement: Air raid situation report. Kurhessen area.

23.24 Twelfth announcement: Air raid situation report. Kurhessen area.

23.29½ Thirteenth announcement: Air raid situation report. Preliminary all clear for Kurhessen.

23.37 Fourteenth announcement: Call upon Frankfurt doctors, midwives, etc. to remain in area.

23.50 Fifteenth announcement: Air raid situation report. All clear for Kurhessen.

The Reichssender Frankfurt is interrupting its programme to bring an important announcement.

(Pause)

Attention, Attention, Command Post of the Gauleiter of Hessen-Nassau. Here is an important announcement for the treck control posts in Kreis Darmstadt.

Advanced enemy tank formations approaching Dudenhofen and Seeligenstadt. All treck companies which are ready move off immediately. Route: Schweinheim - Hessenthal. Further instructions will be issued at the treck control post in Hessenthal town centre.

I repeat: Advance enemy tank formations approaching Dudenhofen and Seeligenstadt. All treck companies which are ready move off immediately Route: Schweinheim - Hessenthal. Further instructions will be issued at the treck control post in Hessenthal town centre.

End of announcement.

Further announcements will follow for Frankfurt, Offenbach and Hanau.

6 and 7.

Attention, Attention - here is an important announcement for all police stations, Volkssturm and Ortsgruppen:

A field grey army car, registration number probably WH 820 571, containing four passengers in German officers' uniform, presumably enemy agents, is travelling away from Hanau in the direction of Gelnhausen/Bad Soden. The car must under all circumstances be stopped and the occupants arrested; if they resist they should be killed.

I repeat: A field grey car .....

An example of a successful Intruder operation. *Above:* **The synopsis for the programme.** *Above right:* **Extracts from the script.** *Below:* **Report on reception monitored in Paris.** *Below right:* **Account published in the *Daily Mail* on March 26, 1945.**

L2 4.10 26.3.45

TO: MR DELMER

(CYPHER) =SPECIAL (PILOT)=

=FROM PARIS TO FOREIGN OFFICE=

MR.DUFF-COOPER

=NO. 506= D)

26TH MARCH,1945 R) 12.58 P.M. 26TH MARCH,1945

=IMMEDIATE=

=TOP SECRET=

=PILOT XL=

FOLLOWING FOR P.ID. FOR DELMER FROM HODGKIN.

RECEPTION RATHER WOOLY AT THE BEGINNING AND THE FIRST 2 MESSAGES NOT QUITE CLEAR. RECEPTION OF 13 REMAINING MESSAGES EXCELLENT. THERE WERE SEVERAL SUDDEN BREAKS LASTING SOME SECONDS THOUGH CARRIER WAS STILL UP. FIRST BREAK CAME AFTER THE WORD OFFENBACH DURING THE FIRST MESSAGE, THE OTHERS DURING MUSICAL PERIODS. VOICE GIVING SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENTS WAS MADE LOUDER AND CLEARER THAN VOICE ANNOUNCING MUSICAL ITEMS BUT PRESUME THIS IS INEVITABLE. PROGRAMME WAS TH TIMES OVER LAID BY FAINT MALE GERMAN VOICE. HOPE YOU HAVE SENT FULL ACCOUNTS OF BOTH OPERATIONS BY AIR MINISTRY COURIER SO AS TO GET HERE AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.

(ADVANCE COPY SENT TO SIR R. LOXX BRUCE LOCKHART.)

O.T.P.

Radio warns 'Tanks near'

FRANKFORT PANICS

FRANKFORT radio broke into its programme time after time last night with warnings of tanks nearing the city, of mysterious "wanted" men racing for the interior of Germany, and of great columns of refugees marching along the roads ahead of the Allied armies.

Warning No. 1 came at 9.28 p.m. This said that "reconnaissance cars" had passed through Oberramstadt, near Darmstadt, and were moving on Grundernhausen, 20 miles from the Rhine.

Ten minutes later it broadcast a warning from the local Gauleiter that "tank spearheads" were approaching Dudenhoffen, 30 miles east of the Rhine and 15 miles south-east of Frankfort.

A little later a woman announcer broadcast an "urgent warning" to all "police, Volkssturm, and local defence posts" to stop an army lorry racing eastwards towards Gelnhausen.

In the lorry said the announcer, were four persons wearing German officers' uniforms presumably enemy agents. The car must be stopped at all costs and its passengers arrested. In case of resistance they must be killed."

Finally the Gauleiter of the province came on the air with a warning which disclosed that the population of Frankfort is in full flight.

He said: "*In order to assure medical attention for the population streaming out of Frankfort, doctors, midwives and chemists in the rest centres of Gelnhausen, Bad Soden, and Schluechtern are urgently requested not to join, for the time being, the marching columns of evacuees.*"

Earlier, Allied pilots had reported a mass exodus along the Frankfort railways.

Left: **The short-wave transmitter building also stood within the Aspidistra compound.** *Right:* **The decor, reminiscent of cinema interiors of the 1930s-era, was the work of Cecil Williamson who had worked in the film business before the war.**

One further use was found for 'Aspidistra'. Although the war was nearing its inevitable end, the Luftwaffe's night fighter force was still capable of inflicting heavy losses, and the Air Ministry asked if Delmer's team at Milton Bryan could assist in any way with disrupting the German fighter controllers. The transmitters of the Deutschlandsender were very powerful and the German controllers used its network to broadcast running commentary instructions to their fighter pilots. Effective interference was obviously a job for 'Aspidistra'.

Delmer consulted the PWE psychological adviser, Dr J. T. McCurdy, and learned that the greatest confusion could be caused if MB listened to a fighter control commentary, recorded it, and then re-recorded it several times over on the same disc with a small time difference between each. This was done and the resultant recording was broadcast by 'Aspidistra' on the Deutschlandsender frequency whenever Allied bombers were under attack.

Another, and very simple, variation of the same theme was to record the German fighter control commentary during an RAF raid on, say, Cologne and to broadcast it several nights later when Berlin was under attack. The Luftwaffe pilots, believing the instructions to be genuine, used up their fuel circling in vain over a city that was not under attack. This very effective trick was code-named 'Dartboard'.

The Atlantiksender and Soldatensender West closed down for the last time on the night of April 29/30, 1945, without any formal announcement. Harold Robin must have realised that Delmer's work would be of interest to historians in the future and he recorded the last two days' broadcasts on more than 20 discs. He kept them at his home until 1981 when they were lodged for posterity with the Imperial War Museum. They have since been transcribed onto tape.

Harold Robin, who retired in 1971, pays a nostalgic return visit.

Very little else remains. Soldatensender West was last off the air at 5.59 a.m. on April 30, 1945. Immediately afterwards, Delmer threw a party in the MB canteen and on the following morning he called his staff together for the last time. He told them that, even after the war, security must be maintained and that no matter what might be said by the BBC, PWE, or any other source, they must never reveal their wartime experiences. His reason was to prevent the Germans from claiming that the war had been won by propaganda as they had done after the First World War when Lord Northcliffe boasted about his work as the British propaganda chief. The meeting over, the staff set to and collected all the scripts, documents and recordings and burned them outside the main building.

Just how successful the British black propaganda radio operation was will probably never be known. Immediately after the end of the war in Europe, Delmer was asked to go to Germany to conduct a survey on the

Artistic elements worthy of an Odeon. HMGCC is short for His Majesty's Government Communications Centre, changed to

Diplomatic Wireless Service (DWS) after the war. ASPI 4 refers to a 50kW Marconi short-wave transmitter in another building.

After the war, Aspidistra became part of the facilities provided by the External Services of the BBC, by the Diplomatic Wireless Service — now the Communications Engineering Department of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. It remained in continuous service for forty years but ceased regular transmissions on September 28, 1982 when Harold Robin was accorded the privilege of performing the final shutdown.

impact of his work, but he declined on the grounds that he had done the job to the best of his ability and it was now finished. He did go to Germany: he went to Hamburg on behalf of the Foreign Office to make sure that the Germans read the 'right' sort of newspapers, and his former studios at Milton Bryan continued in use for a while, sending on Hell-schreiber the 'right' sort of information for publication.

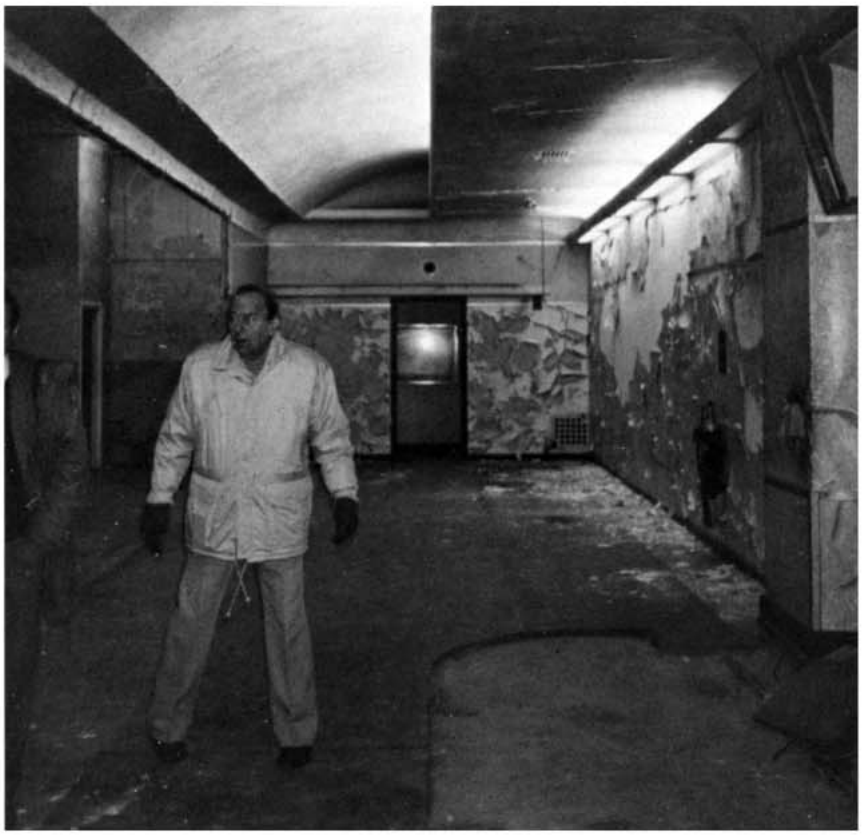
Despite the lack of an official survey, there is a considerable amount of evidence that the Atlantiksender and the Soldatensender had a very wide and varied audience and caused great concern to the Nazi hierarchy even if the broadcasts did not actually accelerate the German surrender. Interrogation reports reveal an enormous amount of 'come back' and show that the programmes were listened to by members of all Services in very large numbers, and in most war theatres.

In 1944, Hitler ordered Himmler and his deputy, Walter Schellenberg, to investigate the truth of the Soldatensender news items and to search for a German origin.

After the plot on Hitler's life in July of the same year, a large team of military radio specialists was ordered into the Führerhauptquartier at Rastenburg in East Prussia to check the telephone system for line taps as it was thought that British propagandists might be obtaining information by this means.

Among captured documents after the German surrender were several reports containing warnings against listening to the Soldatensender, but perhaps the most telling evidence came from one of the men for whom the Atlantiksender was intended.

Peter 'Ali' Cremer joined the Kriegsmarine before the war and was one of only three senior U-Boat commanders to survive its full period. Severely wounded in a surface battle with a British corvette, HMS *Crocus*, his badly-damaged boat was nursed back to La Pallice by an officer placed aboard from a U-tanker and then, after a period in hospital, he was appointed Second Staff Officer at



Five years later Harold Robin returned; a sad day indeed.

Work began to dismantle the equipment in May 1984 and by 1986 the interior presented a sorry sight. Outside, the aerials were demolished by the simple expedient of cutting the guy wires and letting them fall down. (Felix Delmer)

U-Boat headquarters. He ended the war as a Fregattenkapitän and the commander of the bodyguard of Grand Admiral Karl Dönitz. Cremer relates that U-Boat headquarters had a retired commander, Gottfried Teiffer, who was responsible for the analysis of British propaganda, and how this officer recruited radio operators to write down the Atlantiksender programmes. During Cremer's term as Second Staff Officer (February to April, 1943), U-Boat headquarters was in Berlin. At first the HQ staff treated the Atlantiksender with amusement but it was not long before the laughter was replaced by grave concern. Dönitz referred to the station as 'Poison Kitchen Atlantic'.

The Atlantiksender broadcasts gave the U-Boat men the impression that nothing was secret any more and they began to talk openly in the bars and cafés at the French bases. This careless talk caused the frequency of the regular monthly lectures on security to be increased to fortnightly and in some bases to once a week, for it was now apparent that the British interrogators worked closely with the staff at MB.

Despite the frequent lectures, the British interrogators continued to extract the information they required and passed it on to Delmer. In a final attempt to counter the intelligence leak, the Oberkommando der Marine ordered a documentary film to be made. When completed it was realised that its clear and unintended message was that the life of a prisoner-of-war in British hands was quite comfortable. The film was never screened.

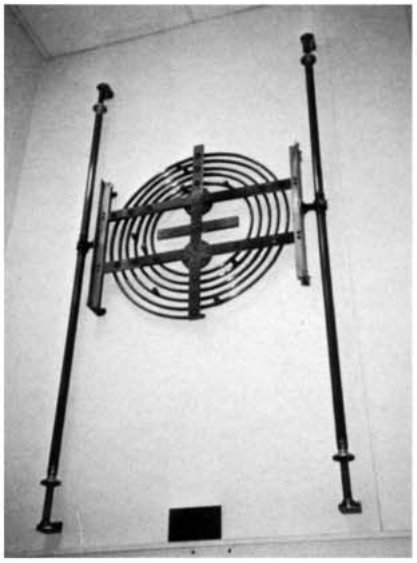
Aboard his own boat, Cremer pretended not to know that his radio operators listened to the Atlantiksender sports results every day, and on June 1, 1942, he was unnerved when the station announced that he would be taking *U-333* to sea on the following day.

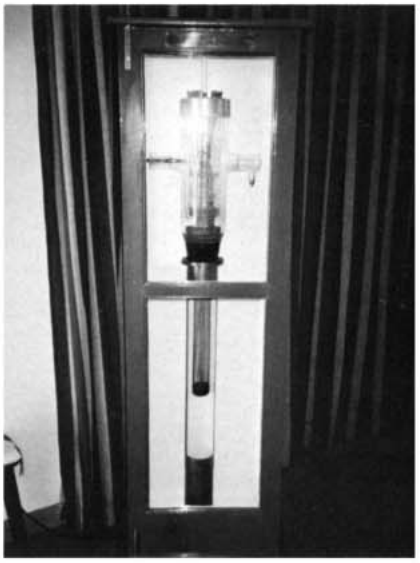
Some official responsible for matters concerning former prisoners-of-war, possibly with a wry sense of humour, ended the story of Milton Bryan with an ironic twist. It may, of course, have been entirely coincidental but, when the period that was to become known as the 'Cold War' began, there were many prisoners still in England whose homes were in East Germany and who could not be repatriated. The compound at Milton Bryan became a camp for former U-Boat officers and ratings — the very men at whom the Atlantiksender had been aimed. The prefabricated huts where Clifton Child, the scriptwriters and others had worked were converted into barrack blocks for the German inmates, and the canteen became their recreation hall. It is highly unlikely that the U-Bootbesatzungen ever knew that their temporary home in Bedfordshire was the place from which the programme they had so often listened to was broadcast.

When the Germans finally went home in 1949 — four years after the war's end — their place was taken by Irish farm labourers, and when they left, the MB complex was left to fall into decay. Today, the main building, which housed the broadcasting studios and in which Sefton Delmer and Harold Robin had their offices, still stands but in a ruinous and badly-neglected state.

The buildings that housed the transmitter at Potsgrove still stand, but the steel aerial masts have long since been removed.

'Aspidistra' continued on long after the war and was used on the World Service and BBC European Service. In September 1982, Harold Robin attended a shutdown ceremony and pressed the 'off' button for the last time. The transmitter should have been preserved but Robin had retired from the Foreign Office in 1971 and had no influence to prevent its sale for scrap. The underground building has since been extended and refitted by the Home Office, presumably for the storage of records, but the outside buildings still remain untouched and as they were during the war years.





Aspidistra's duties were taken over by more modern equipment at Orfordness and it is there that two pieces remaining from the scrapped transmitter can be seen displayed. *Left:* **One of the three RF output coupling coils.** *Centre:* **One of Aspi's massive power triodes. For the technically minded, it is an RCA 898A as used in the Class C power amplifier and Class B modulator stages. There were 26 of these valves in the transmitter. The 898A had an anode dissipation capability of 50 kW and was operated at 12 kV DC anode voltage. The 33-volt, 3-phase filament was of pure tungsten and dissipated 4 kW. Due to valve obsolescence, the transmitter was re-valved with English Electric Valve Company BW189 triodes which were in use right up to the final closure of the transmitter.** *Right:* **And in Felix Delmer's garden a final relic — one of the huge insulators which stands almost like a memorial to his father's wartime achievements.**

SILENT HEROES

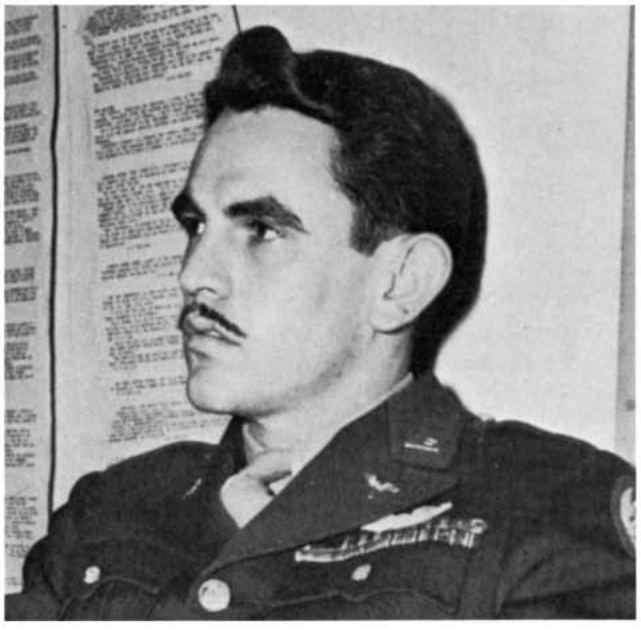
By Manuel F. van Eyck

For a number of years, Manuel van Eyck has been researching the loss of every American aircraft brought down in Czechoslovakia from February 1944 to April 1945, trying to establish the details of each combat and the fate of the crews. It is one aspect of the air war which has received scant attention to date, although casualties were high, eleven aircraft being brought down on one particular day (August 29, 1944). Manuel hopes to publish the results of his research in a book called *Silent Heroes*; till then, this is the story of just two who failed to return: Captain Raymond F. Reuter and 1st Lieutenant William R. Preddy of the 503rd Fighter Squadron, 339th Fighter Group,

In the last months of WWII, when the German armies on the Eastern Front were desperately retreating deeper and deeper into Germany in the face of the Red Army, occupied Czechoslovakia was still a formidable German stronghold. In Bohemia were the remains of several German armies under Army Group Mitte. In charge was Generalfeldmarschall Ferdinand Schörner. His group comprised what was left of the following armies: First and Fourth Panzer Armies, Seventeenth Army and remnants of the Eighth Army Ostmark. There were also units of SS-Wiking, SS-Wallenstein and SS-Das Reich, totalling approximately one million fighting men.

In early April, Allied aircraft were intensively strafing all German military targets in Bohemia and Moravia. The Eighth, Ninth and Fifteenth Air Force's P-51s, P-38s and P-47s were attacking all rail targets and airfields, and Ruzyne and Kbely around Prague were packed with different types of German aircraft. However, strafing these targets was not easy because of intense and accurate anti-aircraft fire and, in April alone, the German AA defences shot down more than 26 American fighter aircraft over Bohemia.

On Tuesday, April 17, 1945, Mustangs of the 503rd Fighter Squadron, 339th Fighter Group, led by the squadron leader, Captain Raymond F. Reuter, attacked Kbely airfield south-east of Prague. It was approximately 2.30 p.m. when the American aircraft went in only to be caught in a barrage of 20mm and 40mm flak from the airfield defences.



Left: **1st Lieutenant William R. Preddy was the brother of the more well known Captain George E. Preddy of the 352nd Fighter Group. George Preddy *(right)* became one of the USAAF's top scorers with over 26 victories before he was shot down by American anti-aircraft fire over Belgium on Christmas Day 1944 — one of the Eighth Army Air Force's greatest tragedies. Today both brothers lie side by side in Lorraine Military Cemetery at St Avold in eastern France, together with Captain Reuter. (Reuter's grave is in Plot G with the Preddy brothers in Plot A — Row 21, Graves 42 and 43.)**

Captain Raymond Reuter, Grave 11 in Row 7, just one of more than 10,000 graves concentrated from all over eastern Europe in St Avold (lying mid-way between Metz and Saarbrucken), which is itself one of the fourteen war cemeteries set up by the United States after the Second World War.

At that moment, 1st Lieutenant Joseph G. Farrell broke to the left, away from the flak, with the rest of the squadron following. However Captain Reuter and 1st Lieutenant William R. Preddy turned to the right but five minutes later were instructed by 1st Lieutenant Joseph G. Farrell to rendezvous over the river south-west of Prague. Before the rest of the squadron could get there, Captain Reuter radioed that he was chasing two enemy jets. After several minutes he called that he had given up the chase and was heading due south; this was the last the squadron heard of Reuter or Preddy. The time was 2.45 p.m.

Both pilots were still listed as missing as late as October 1945, but in March 1946 the parents of 1st Lieutenant Preddy were informed by official letter that their son's remains had now been interred in Lorraine American Military Cemetery at St Avold, France. However, there was no explanation as to how or where he had met his end.

In 1984, after I had begun research into the fate of all American aircraft lost over Czechoslovakia, the names of Captain Reuter and 1st Lieutenant Preddy came up. When I discovered that both pilots had been shot down close together at around the same time, and so quickly that neither of them could use the radio to indicate their position, I was determined to find the location.

In 1986 I obtained from Czechoslovakia an eyewitness report about the crash of an Allied aircraft in the area south of Prague. However, this report was dated April 18, 1945 and the pilot was described as Canadian, by name Adalbert Preddy. In 1989 I located the eyewitness and sent him a photograph of 1st Lieutenant Preddy. Jan Smejkal immediately recognised him as the American pilot and also corrected the date of the incident. Here then is what happened on April 17, 1945.

That Tuesday, Mr Smejkal and his family were planting potatoes in fields approximately 400 metres north of their village of Zaluzi. Mr Smejkal stated that from the village there is a good view of the city of Ceske Budejovice and on this day, at around 2.30 p.m., he and his family observed three Allied aircraft strafing the German airfield at Plane near Ceske Budejovice. This Luftwaffe airfield was primarily used for completion and testing of Me 262 jet aircraft.

After several passes over the airfield, one aircraft received a direct hit and crashed in flames near the village of Borsov in the vicinity of the airfield. The second aircraft was also hit and, trailing smoke, the pilot directed his aircraft in a westerly direction towards the village of Holubov between the settlements of Vrabce and Kroclov. It was evident that the pilot was seeking somewhere to land, but the terrain from Kroclov towards

The fourteen sites for permanent cemeteries had been selected by 1947 and by 1949 the majority of the work of transferring remains from the hundreds of temporary cemeteries had been completed. Meanwhile the American Graves Registration Service was also exhuming and returning to the States over 172,000 bodies at the request of the next of kin. Thus, today, only about 60 percent of all American casualties of the Second World War lie in the permanent cemeteries.

Holubov is covered with heavily wooded hills so, turning his damaged aircraft above the village of Trisov, he headed south-west towards the village of Zaluzi.

From Trisov the aircraft was rapidly losing altitude and, after crossing the river Vltava, the pilot might have made a good landing had he not hit two trees, eight metres tall, on the hillside with his undercarriage. The aircraft rolled sharply to starboard and flipped over on its back with the fuselage broken. The pilot was seen hanging upside down in the cockpit.

'I was watching this crash with my brother, sister and my mother,' recalled Jan Smejkal. 'It looked to us as though the aircraft crash-landed fairly well. We left our horses and ran towards the smoking wreckage. Already there was an old farmer, Tomas Caba, who had guessed where the aircraft would land. Once we got there we saw that some parts were burning.

'We removed the pilot from his seat and put out the fire. The pilot was alive but was bleeding from a wound on his forehead. He was approximately 21 years old with bushy eyebrows and dark hair. At this time more people were running to the crash site and some women helped bandage the wounded pilot's head as best they could. At that time a third aircraft, not damaged by flak, circled twice and then flew away in a south-westerly direction. Thirty minutes later a group of four men from the Gestapo arrived. They searched the wounded pilot and removed his pistol from its holster; however they did not seem to understand how to operate it. They also made the remark: "This dog was shooting at our women and children." Then they ordered the Mayor of our village to transport the pilot to hospital.

'All the other farmers who were present were afraid so I decided to take the pilot to the military hospital myself. I ran to our horses and I hitched up the youngest one to our wagon. I made a bed with straw and blankets and placed the wounded pilot onto it. Then I asked two of my friends if they would go with me. They were Jan Burger and Jan Lastovka.

'The trip to Ceske Budejovice, about 17 kilometres, took us about three hours. The field roads were very bad and we couldn't go too fast because the wounded pilot was constantly screaming even though he was unconscious. On the road between Rancicemi and Kamennym Ujezdem we were stopped by another group of Gestapo who were going to see the crash site. The Gestapo men again searched the uniform of the pilot.

The 339th Fighter Group was based at Fowlmere for its entire service in the United Kingdom. Its P-51s *(above)* claimed some 240 aircraft shot down and another 440 destroyed on the ground. It was from the Cambridgeshire airfield that the squadron set out just three weeks before the end of the European war to attack ground targets near Prague. While strafing the German-occupied airfeld at Kbely, just north of the Czech capital, the squadron split up when it came under intense ground fire. The squadron leader, Captain Reuter, broke away south with Lieutenant Preddy, radioing that they were in pursuit of two Me 262s. It would seem that after a chase of about a hundred miles, the German jets reached their base near Ceske Budejovice, possibly with the American Mustangs still in pursuit. The P-51s then began shooting up the airfield, being hit in the process.

From an eyewitness report, it appears that Preddy caught his undercarriage in this tree trying to land his damaged aircraft, whereupon he crash-landed upside down. Having been extracted from his aircraft and taken to Ceske Budejovice critically injured, he was transferred by the Germans to the hospital in Rumburk where he was operated upon. Reports indicate that he was still alive on May 8 when the patients were evacuated to Martinovo Udoli near Cvikov. There he died on May 10 and was buried two days later in the same grave as two Russian soldiers.

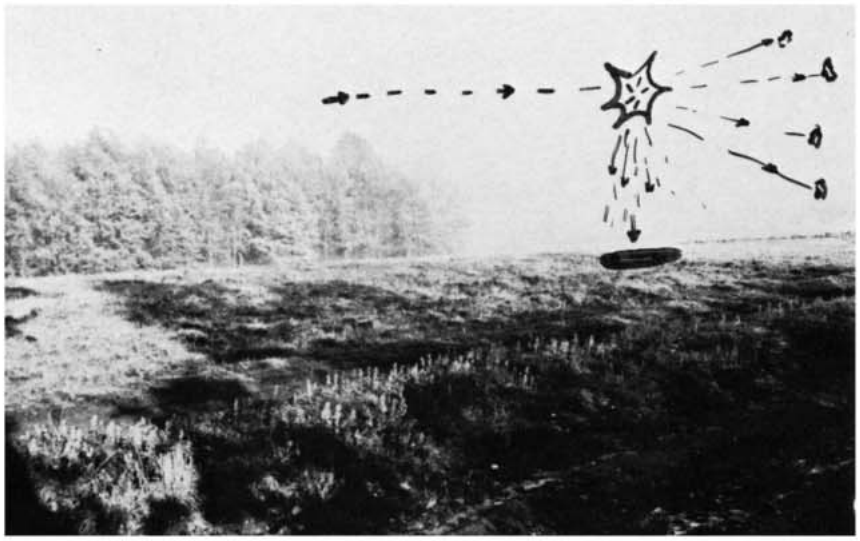
After they left I noticed in his breast pocket a small American flag covered in plastic and also I noticed a gold chain with some kind of identification tag on it but because we did not have a pencil between us, we could not write the information down.

'We reached Kamenny Ujezd where I knew there was a German Army doctor. However he asked me if I had permission from the Gestapo and I told him that I received orders from them to take the wounded pilot to a doctor. He bandaged the pilot's leg and sent us on our way; even though they had a military ambulance available, they did not offer it to us to take him to hospital.

'It was now already about 4.30. By 8.00 p.m. we reached the military hospital in Ceske Budejovice. After we reported at the guardhouse the Germans made us wait another 45 minutes before medical orderlies arrived with stretchers. When the injured pilot was taken away, it was the last I saw of him. Later on I heard from my friend that he had survived for three or four days. However his burial location was not known because all records from the hospital were destroyed by the retreating Germans.'

In late 1989 I received a letter from one young man in Czechoslovakia who lives in the general area where both aircraft crashed in 1945. This young man researched the location where 1st Lieutenant Preddy crash-landed his Mustang and said he had discovered several items, amongst which were a piston, part of the landing gear and parts of the armoured windscreen, the pilot's seat, and one small instrument panel with several switches.

I now believe that 1st Lieutenant William R. Preddy, piloting P51-K, serial number 44-11623, attempted a landing near Zaluzi and was probably already wounded by flak.



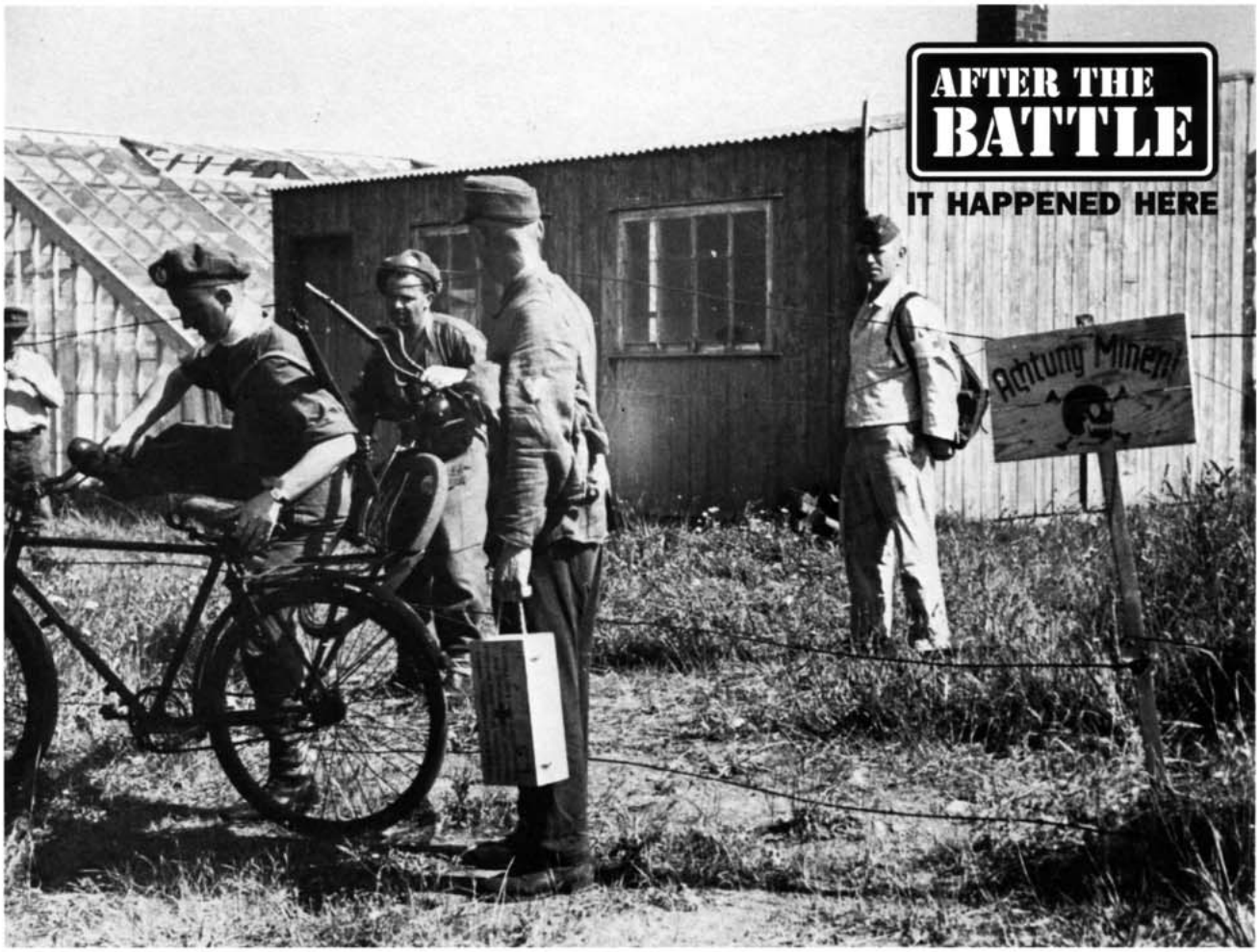
Captain Reuter's aircraft exploded about 150 metres above this meadow near the village of Borsov nad Vltavou which lies beyond the trees on the left.

The other Mustang, a P51-D, serial number 44-72485, piloted by Captain Raymond F. Reuter, received a direct hit and, with his aircraft aflame, he was not able to bail out. His Mustang exploded in mid-air approximately five kilometres south of the airfield near the village of Borsov. His remains were interred on April 21, 1945 as an unknown American pilot, approximately 25 years old with dark hair. These remains were exhumed on May 28, 1945 and transferred to France. The only item which remains from Captain Reuter's Mustang is one propellor blade recovered at the time of the explosion.

Today both pilots are interred in Lorraine American Military Cemetery at St Avold, France, Captain Raymond F. Reuter, 0-689824 in grave G-7-11, and 1st Lieutenant William R. Preddy, 0-2057681 in A-21-42.

The following individuals assisted me in my research: The Reuter family, Harry R. Corey, Lynn O. Gamma, Captain George Cully, Richard L. Boylan, John F. Manning, Stan Hutchings, J. W. Noah, William Hudson, Paul Bodot, Jacques R. Adelee, Bart Beckers, Frantisek Hokr, Pavel Tresnak, Jan Talir, Jan Smejkal.

One of the propeller blades was recovered by Mr Kocina who pictured the scene in 1989. The tree still bears the scars from the explosion which scattered both the aircraft and its pilot across the field.



MINE CLEARANCE IN GUERNSEY

By Harry Beckingham

Following their successful advance across France, the German forces at Cherbourg in June 1940 were planning to mount an invasion of the Channel Islands. Reconnaissance flights over the islands had been undertaken and the activities of the evacuation of many of the islanders had been misconstrued by the German Command as being troop movements. It had therefore prepared plans for the invasion under the code-name 'Green Arrow'.

On June 28, a number of bombers took part in raids on St Helier in Jersey and St Peter Port in Guernsey, in which nearly 200 bombs were dropped, causing death and destruction in the port areas. The main German occupying forces landed on the island of Guernsey in the evening of July 1, and consisted of units drawn from 216. Infanterie-Division.

Life on Guernsey carried on much as normal apart from the presence of German troops. The islanders who remained appeared to get on reasonably well with the occupying forces. With little serious consideration given to the fortification and defence of the island, in spite of a British raiding party having been landed on Guernsey in July 1940 immediately following the occupation *(see After the Battle No. 32)*, it can therefore only be assumed that the German commanders anticipated the invasion of mainland Britain to be imminent and, therefore, the defence of the island was not warranted.

Some six months elapsed before any consideration was given by the German Command to the defence of Guernsey. The first mines were laid on November 20, 1940 and these consisted of 21 'S' mines (short for Schrapnellmine) which were laid in the approach lane to Fermain Bay. During the following six weeks a further 103 'S' mines were laid in small clusters in the areas of Saints Bay, Moulin Huet and La Corbière in the south. In January and February 1941, a further 231 'S' mines were laid but then the whole operation of minelaying came to a standstill.

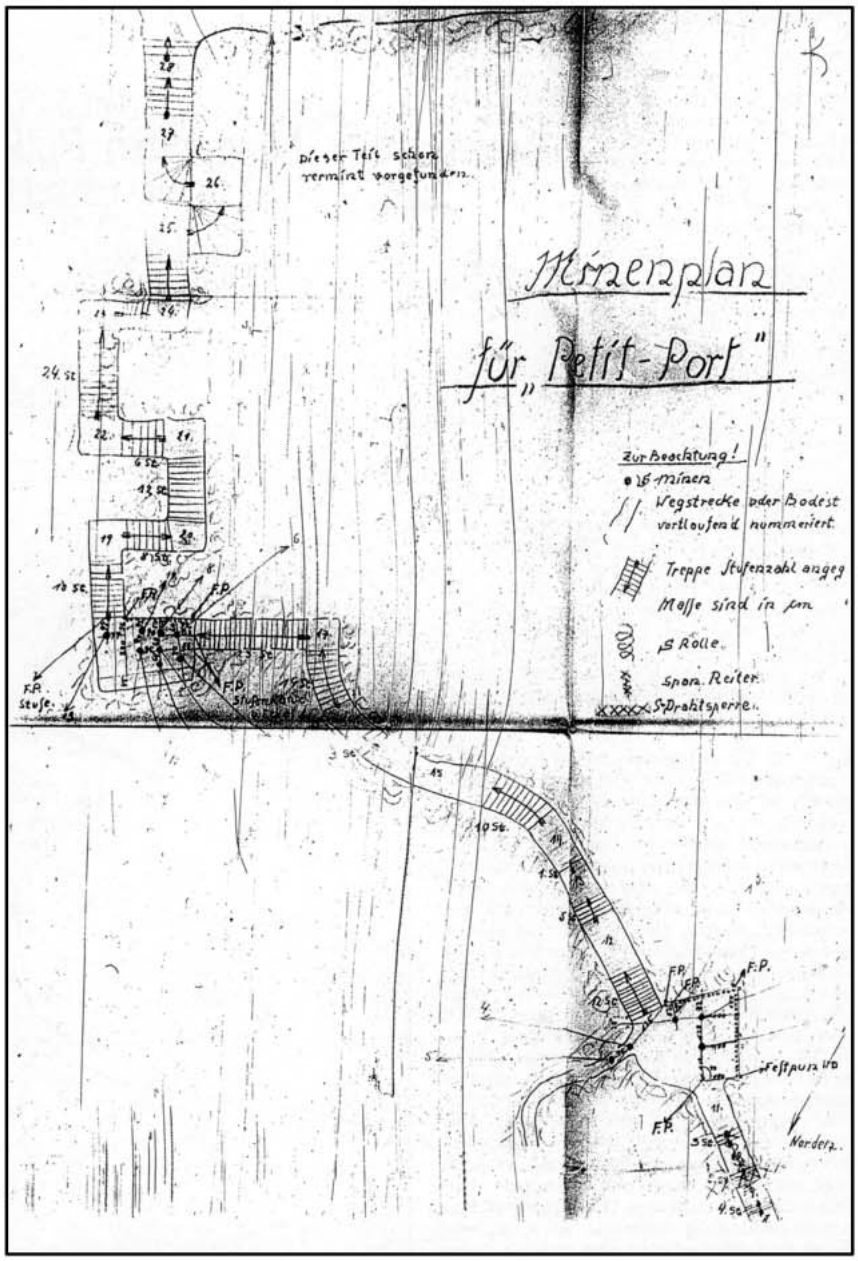
These small minefields, comprising a total of 355 mines, were laid by men of 216. Infanterie-Division. The 'S' mines used were placed in small clusters or in single lines across the access lanes and footpaths leading from Petit Bot, Fermain and Moulin Huet bays. The minefield charts were, unfortunately, not professionally drawn in comparison to those which were produced later by 319. Pionier-Bataillon.

When Germany invaded Russia on June 22, 1941, so opening up the Second Front, Hitler was of the firm opinion that the Allies would launch attacks upon the Channel Islands to help pin down German forces in France and thus help to reduce the pressure on the Russian front.

That same month, some twelve months after the occupation had begun, Hitler gave the Supreme Commander (West), orders that the defences of the Channel Islands had to be strengthened. This directive laid down that heavy coastal batteries had to be installed, minefields laid, and all the beaches secured by the installation of underwater

The author before his promotion to captain in February 1946. Harry Beckingham was in charge of mine clearance in Guernsey with 24 Bomb Disposal Platoon of the Royal Engineers. *Top:* **The minefields were fenced with perimeter wire and warning notices.**

The early minefield plans produced by the 216. Infanterie-Division were poorly executed, but this one is of particular interest as it covers the route used by the Commandos who landed on Guernsey in Operation 'Ambassador' in July 1940 just fourteen days after the island was occupied.



obstacles, mined tetrahedra, etc. Roll bombs were to be located along cliff-tops ready for release should a landing be made. Flame-throwers installed at road junctions and other strategic points, and obstructions, in the form of poles fitted with explosive charges against possible parachute or glider landings, were extensively used over the island's interior.

On the Cotentin peninsula, General Erich Marcks, who commanded LXXXIV. Korps (*see After the Battle No. 68*), had five divisions under his command for the defence of the peninsula, one of which was the 319. Infanterie-Division which was moved to the islands to replace 216. Infanterie-Division in July 1941. Upon their arrival, the situation in respect of the defence of the islands changed dramatically.

On Guernsey, the engineer battalion, under the command of Hauptmann Kias, began to lay its first minefield on October 27 at Fort Le Marchant consisting of 189 'S' mines. Previously not more than 50 mines had been laid in any one location. Work on laying minefields continued on the western promontories and 3,393 'S' mines and 8 Tellermines were laid at Fort Saumarez, Fort Richmond, Fort Hommet, Port Soif, Pulias, Portinfer and Rousse before the year was out.

The work of laying minefields continued unabated throughout 1942 when a further 8,522 'S' mines and 446 Tellermines were laid along the cliff-tops of the south coast.

The following year saw the first introduction of the so-called 'Improvised' mines which were of wooden construction, similar in detail to the 'Schu' mine (an abbreviation of Schützenmine), but were designated by 319. Pionier-Bataillon as Behelfsminen/B2 and Behelfsminen/B4. Some 10,519 of these mines, together with 3,904 'S' mines and 512 Tellermines, were laid during 1943. However, the great bulk of the mines on Guernsey were laid in 1944, a total of 43,842, the bulk of which were 'Schu' and 'S' mines. These two particular anti-personnel mines were used extensively to form protective minefields around the gun batteries of Mirus,

The first mines were not laid until November that year, long after the raid, but it would have been interesting to have shown the plan to ex-Commando Fred Drain when we took him back to Petit Port in 1981 *(left)*. **Sadly, Fred, in the dark pullover, has since died.** *Right:* **In this shot he is standing on the mined area of the path.** ***(See also After the Battle Nos. 32 and 33.)***

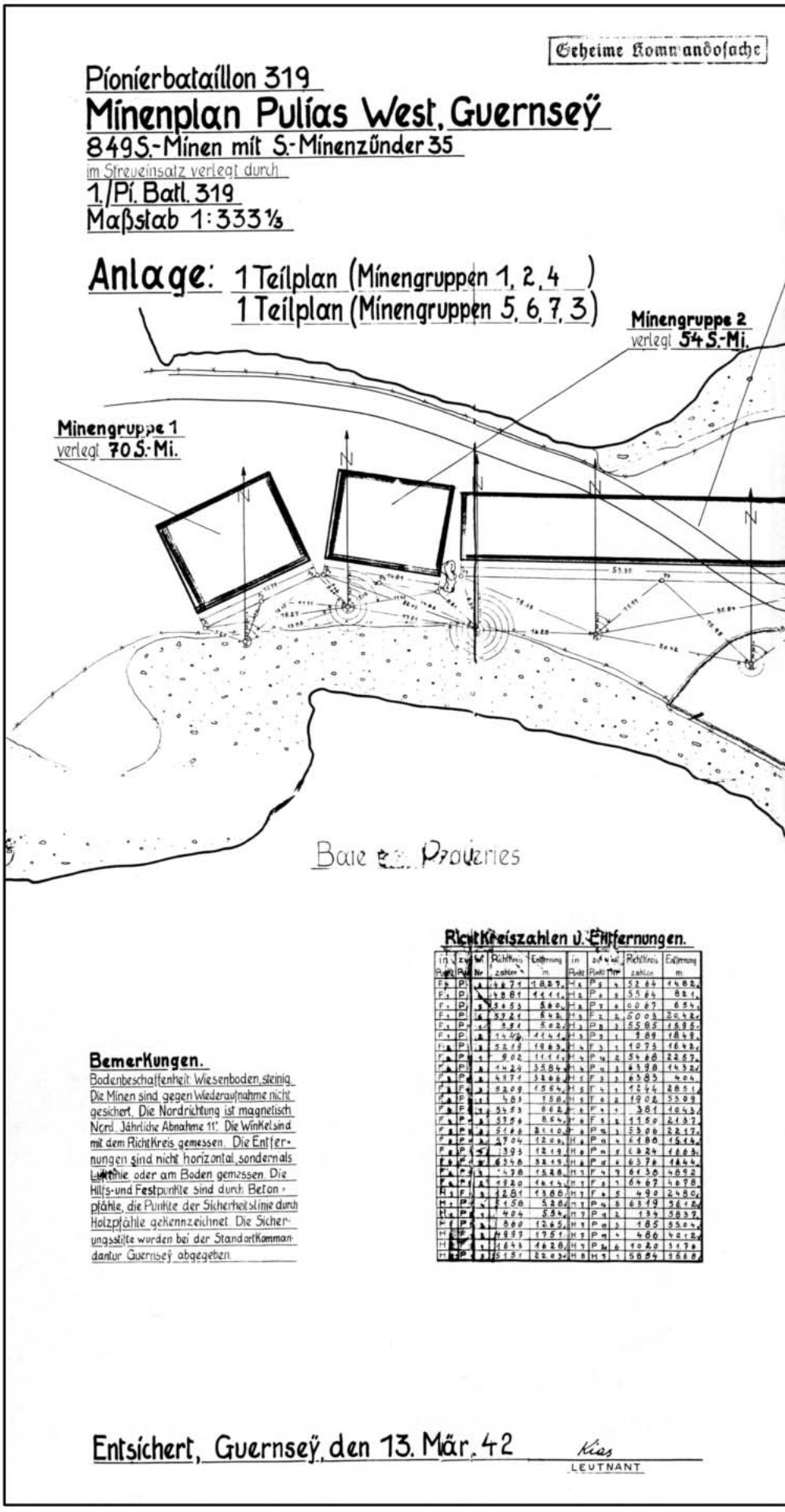
The drawings produced by Hauptmann Kias, on the other hand, were of real architect quality. Kias was transferred to Guernsey with the 319. Infanterie-Division which replaced 216 in July 1941. Hitler was convinced that the Channel Islands, the only British territory occupied by his troops, would be invaded because of his attack on the Soviet Union, and he ordered that the defences be strengthened and improved.

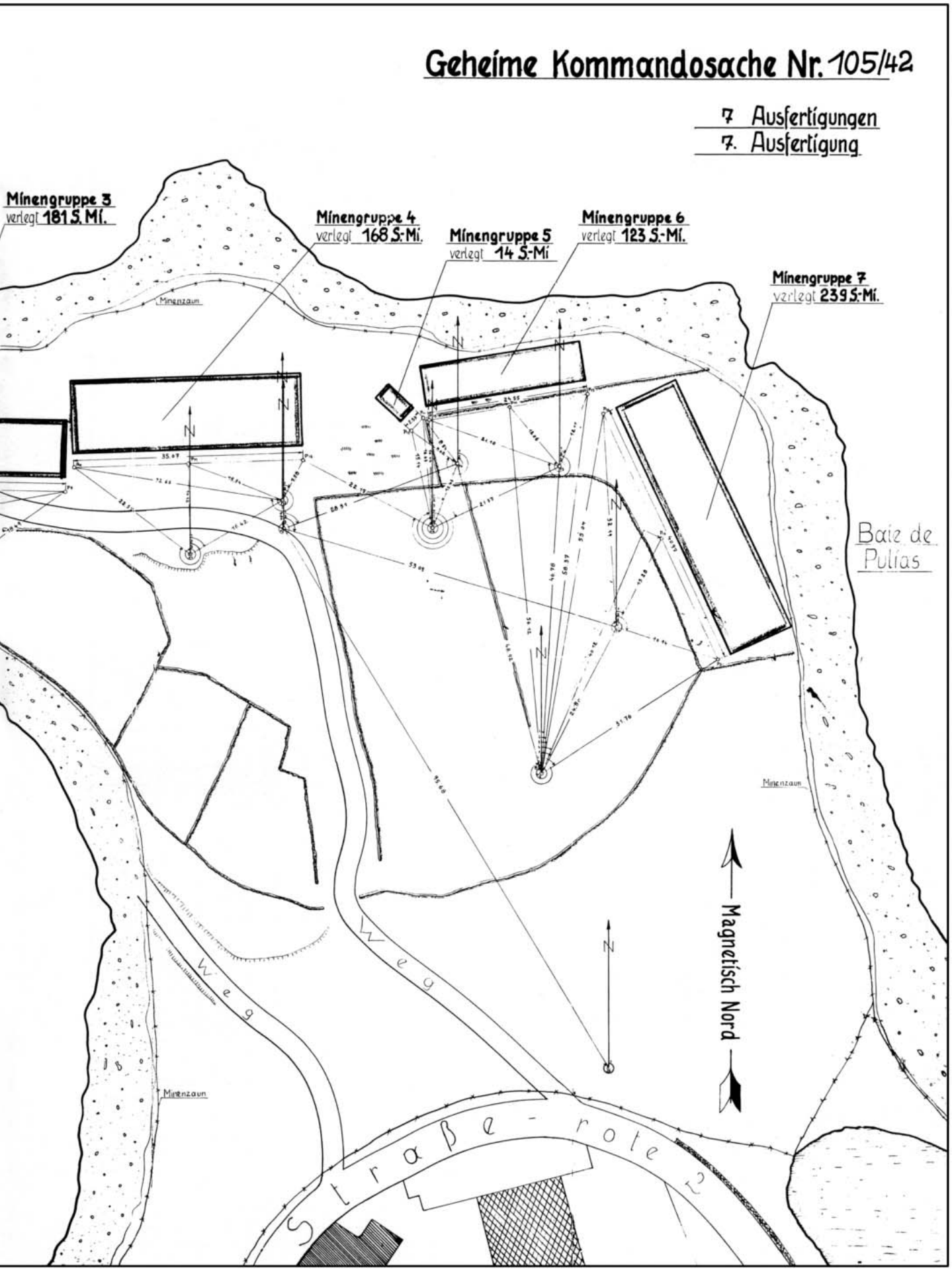
Rinozerous, Barbara, Steinbruch and Elefant and also at the airfield where some 4,000 'Schu' mines were used around the perimeter.

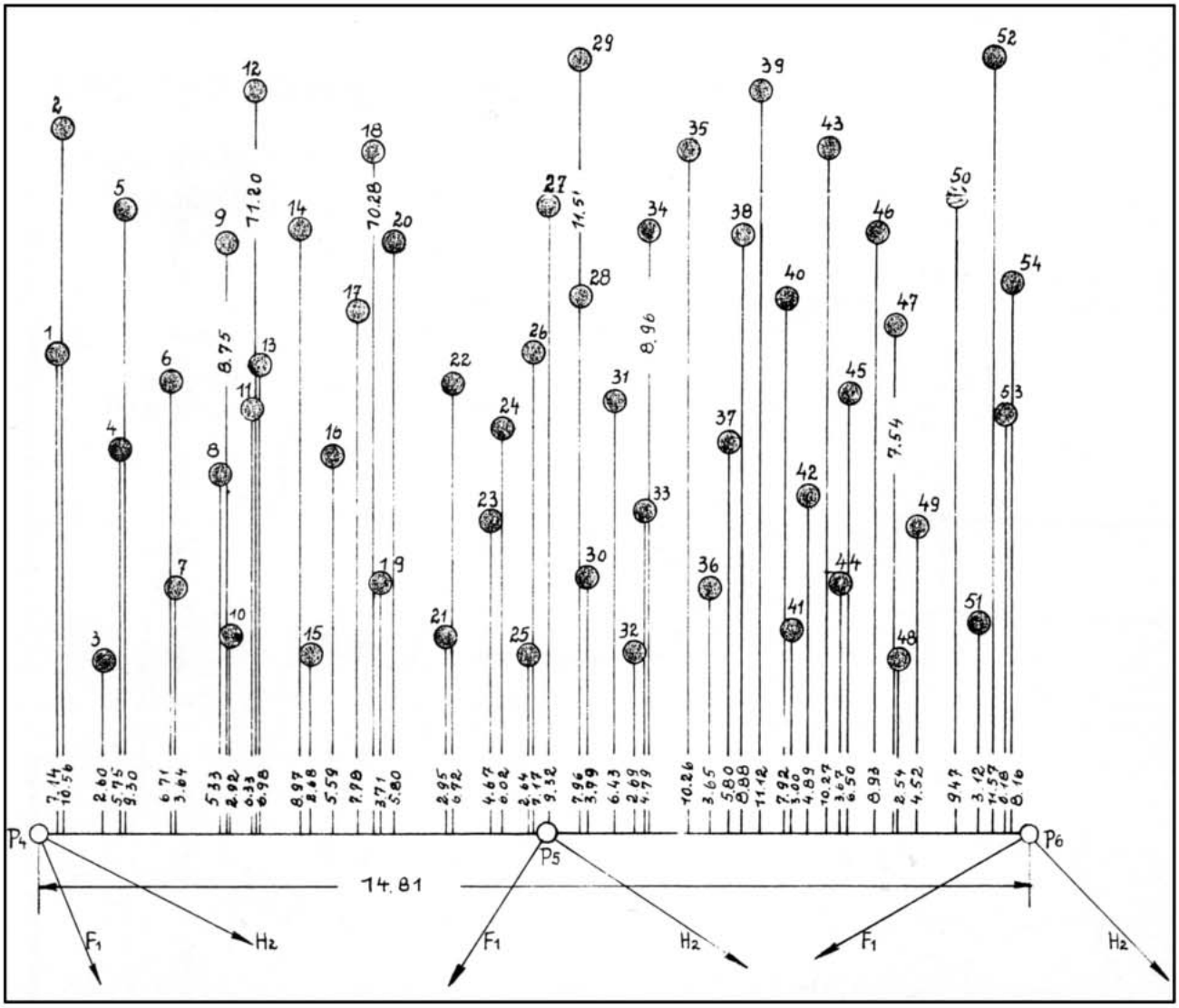
During 1944 the opportunity was also taken to strengthen existing minefields and to fill gaps along the coast, and a further 1,082 'S' mines were laid at L'Eree (Minefield No. 113) and an additional 1,452 'S' mines were introduced into Minefield No. 112 adjacent to St Sampson's Harbour. The last minefield was laid on March 23, 1945, some six weeks before Liberation Day, and consisted of 31 'S' mines in Minefield No. 54 at Jerbourg.

In all, the German forces put down 115 minefields on Guernsey which contained a total of 70,866 mines. They themselves lifted 6,110 mines from 21 minefields during 1944 so we were therefore left with the task of clearing more than 64,000 mines which were spread across 94 minefields.

Right: **This is a typical plan drawn up by Hauptmann Kias who was obviously well aware of the dangers of sloppy minelaying and poor records. When deploying minefields, there are always circumstances in which they have to be lifted by one's own side, and it is therefore imperative that accurate drawings are produced, listing the number of mines sown, so that those who have the job of clearing them can be sure that all mines laid have been recovered. The fact that Lieutenant Beckingham, working with Hauptmann Kias, was able to clear over 64,000 mines in 94 separate minefields in under eight weeks is testimony to the comprehensive records available (unlike the Argentinians in the Falklands and Iraqi forces in Kuwait, whose irresponsibility has left an awful legacy which even modern technology cannot eradicate). The site plan indicates the extent of the whole minefield (marked with barbed wire) and then shows the precise position of each 'Minengruppe'.** *Below:* **Concrete 'Punkt' points mark the base datum line, from which all measurements are taken, for each group of mines.**


Geheime Kommandosache
Pionierbataillon 319
Minenplan Pulias West, Guernseÿ
849 S.-Minen mit S.-Minenzünder 35
im Streueinsatz verlegt durch
1./Pi. Batl. 319
Maßstab 1:333⅓
Anlage: 1 Teilplan (Minengruppen 1, 2, 4)
1 Teilplan (Minengruppen 5, 6, 7, 3)
Minengruppe 2
verlegt 54 S.-Mi.
Minengruppe 1
verlegt 70 S.-Mi.
N
Baie des Proueries
Richtkreiszahlen u. Entfernungen.
Bemerkungen.
Bodenbeschaffenheit: Wiesenboden, steinig.
Die Minen sind gegen Wiederaufnahme nicht gesichert. Die Nordrichtung ist magnetisch Nord. Jährliche Abnahme 11°. Die Winkel sind mit dem Richtkreis gemessen. Die Entfernungen sind nicht horizontal, sondern als Luftlinie oder am Boden gemessen. Die Hilfs- und Festpunkte sind durch Betonpfähle, die Punkte der Sicherheitslinie durch Holzpfähle gekennzeichnet. Die Sicherungsliste wurden bei der Standortkommandantur Guernseÿ abgegeben.
Entsichert, Guernseÿ, den 13. Mär. 42
Kias
LEUTNANT


Geheime Kommandosache Nr. 105/42
7 Ausfertigungen
7. Ausfertigung
Minengruppe 3
verlegt 181 S. Mi.
Minengruppe 4
verlegt 168 S. Mi.
Minengruppe 5
verlegt 14 S. Mi
Minengruppe 6
verlegt 123 S. Mi.
Minengruppe 7
verlegt 239 S. Mi.
Minenzaun
Baie de Pulias
Weg
Weg
Straße - rote 2
Magnetisch Nord

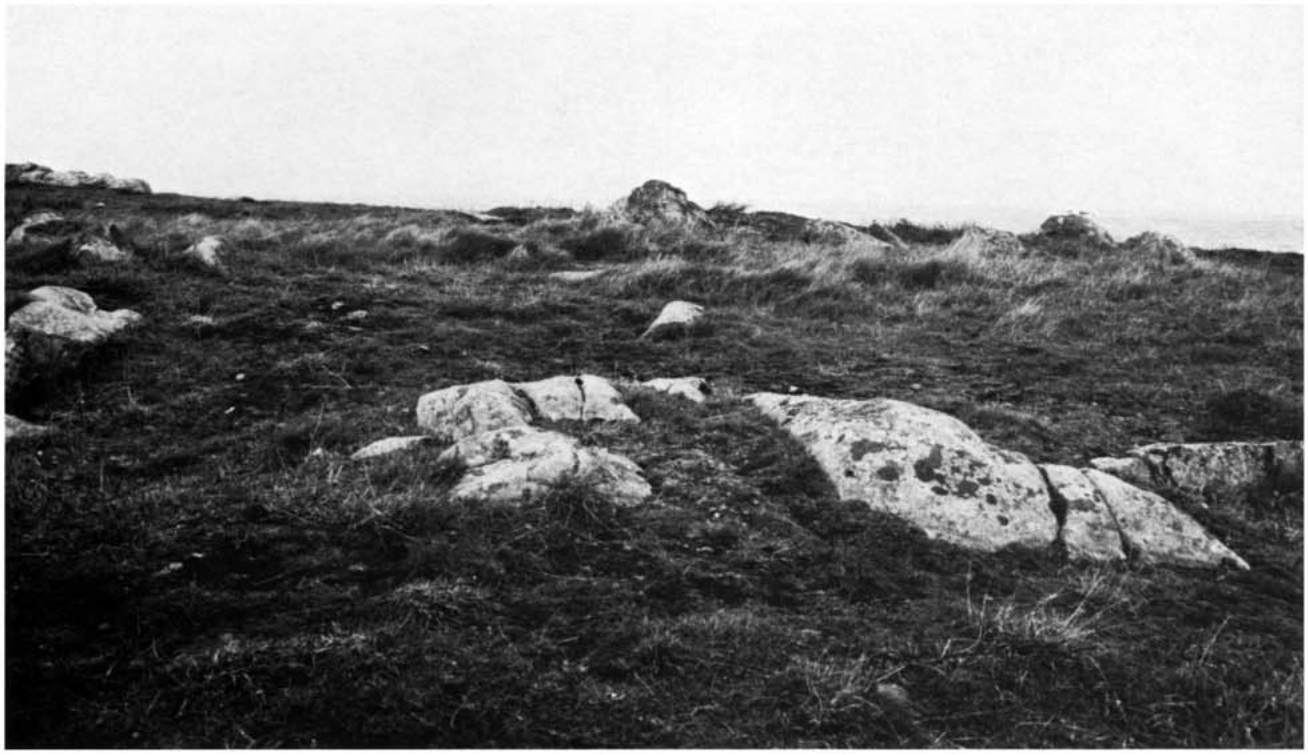


Subsidiary plans and tables indicate the exact distance of each mine from the base line. This is the detailed drawing for Pulias West Minengruppe 2 which contained 54 'S' mines.

Mi Nr.	Rechtswert	Hochwert
1	0.31	7.14
2	0.38	10.56
3	0.98	2.60
4	1.27	5.75
5	1.33	9.30
6	2.01	6.71
7	2.05	3.64
8	2.74	5.33
9	2.82	8.75
10	2.88	2.92
11	3.25	6.33
12	3.28	11.20
13	3.30	6.98
14	3.96	8.97
15	4.10	2.68
16	4.42	5.59
17	4.80	7.78
18	5.05	10.28
19	5.13	3.71
20	5.35	5.80
21	6.12	2.95
22	6.22	6.72
23	6.82	4.67
24	6.97	6.02
25	7.38	2.64
26	7.44	7.17
27	7.66	9.32
28	8.12	7.96
29	8.12	11.51
30	8.23	3.79
31	8.66	6.43
32	8.95	2.69
33	9.11	4.79
34	9.16	8.96
35	9.78	10.26
36	10.05	3.65
37	10.37	5.80
38	10.59	6.88
39	10.85	11.12
40	11.26	7.92
41	11.28	3.00
42	11.58	4.89
43	11.88	10.27
44	12.01	3.67
45	12.17	6.50
46	12.57	8.93
47	12.85	7.54
48	12.89	2.54
49	13.20	4.52
50	13.82	9.47
51	14.10	3.12
52	14.40	11.57
53	14.52	6.18
54	14.60	8.16

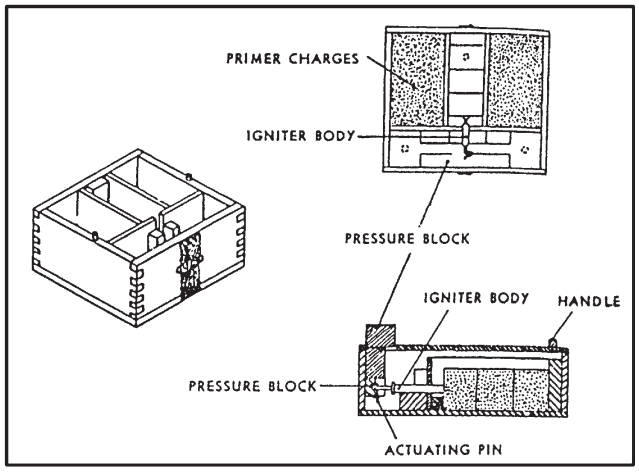
At the same time that mines were being put down, other troops were engaged in installing anti-paratroop spiders over a very large area of the island. These spiders consisted of 300lb French shells standing in the middle of a field with numerous wires leading from the detonators through an overhead ring to posts around the perimeter of the field. These wires were supported eight feet from the ground, which enabled cattle to be grazed in the fields. There was a similar arrangement to protect the areas around the airfield, Bordeaux Harbour, L'Ancresse Common, etc., against gliders and parachute landings. Poles were dotted over these areas and a shell buried six feet from each pole. A ZZ35 igniter was then wired from the nose of the shell to the top of the post.

In addition to all the above, over a thousand roll bombs had been placed in position along the South Cliffs. These again consisted of 300lb French shells secured by wire and a picket to the cliff-top. A ZZ35 igniter was screwed into the nose of the shell and a wire led from it to another picket. The purpose of these roll bombs was that in the event of a landing at the foot of the cliffs, the wire holding the roll bomb would be cut, the fall of the bomb would activate the igniter, and an explosion would take place.

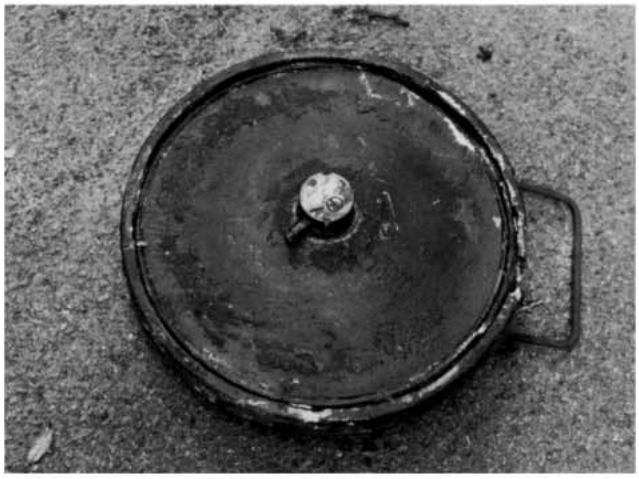


And this is Minengruppe 2 today. The Pulias West minefield lay on the north-west side of the island in St Sampson. The picture was taken from Punkt P6 looking west although no trace of the concrete markers remain.

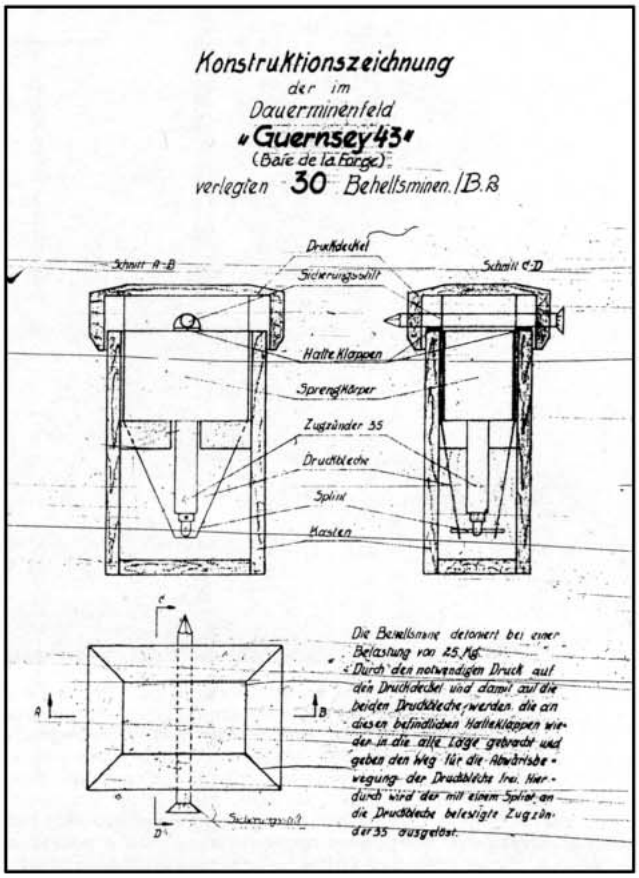
There were six main types of mine laid in Guernsey. First the Schrapnellmine *(left)*, more usually referred to as the 'S' mine. This was an anti-personnel device which was operated by direct pressure of about 15 lbs on a push igniter in the head, or by a pull from one or more trip wires attached to a pull igniter. The mine was cylindrical in shape and consisted of an outer casing and an inner cylinder which contained a TNT charge surrounded by approximately 360 ball-bearings. At the base of the mine was a black powder propellant charge. When the igniter fired, the flame produced flashed down the centre tube, setting off this charge which threw the inner cylinder into the air. At the same time the detonators were ignited and they in turn set off the main charge. The delay in detonation permitted the casing to rise about 2 to 3 feet above ground level before exploding. The shrapnel filling was effective up to a range of about 200 yards. This mine could be activated by a ZZ35 igniter with a three-pronged antenna, or it could also be used with a 'Y' adaptor and two pull igniters to which could be attached trip wires connecting a series of mines together. The third alternative was to use a three-way adaptor so that a three-prong pressure adapter and two pull igniters could be used. *Right:* The second most common type was the Schützenmine, seen here in the hands of a sapper. The 'Schu' mine (also sometimes described in English as the Shoe mine) was a small wooden box with a hinged lid, containing approximately half a pound of explosive. It was activated either by pressure on the lid or by a ZZ35 igniter similar to that used in the 'S' mine. The igniter could be wired to a small stake or alternatively two or more mines could be joined together by means of trip wires. This mine was generally constructed using tongued and grooved joints so that they were extremely difficult to locate using the standard mine detector. These mines had to be located by crawling along the ground and prodding gently with a bayonet at an angle of 30 degrees to prevent the mine being fired.

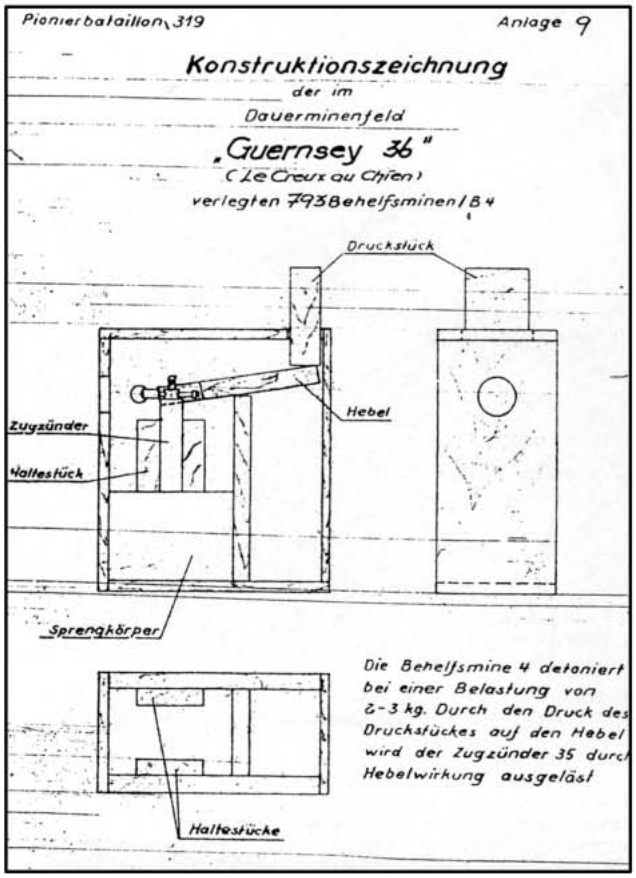


Another wooden box mine was known as the 'Holzmine 42'. The body of this mine consisted of a wooden box divided into four compartments by removable partitions. The two side compartments contained the main explosive filling, the central compartment the 7-oz primer charges, and the end compartment the operating mechanism. The main filling consisted of two charges of Amatol covered with a bitumastic substance as a protection against water. The end compartment contained a shearing flange secured to the outside wall by two ⅜-inch wooden dowels. It was provided with a central slot to receive the end of the striker. The igniter rest consisted of a small block of wood with a 'U'-shaped piece cut out at the top and screwed to the base from the underside. A pressure applied on the pressure block shears the dowels securing the shear flange to the outer wall of the mine and forces the flange down on to the igniter pin which was then withdrawn, freeing the spring-loaded striker. The fuze used is the ZZ42.

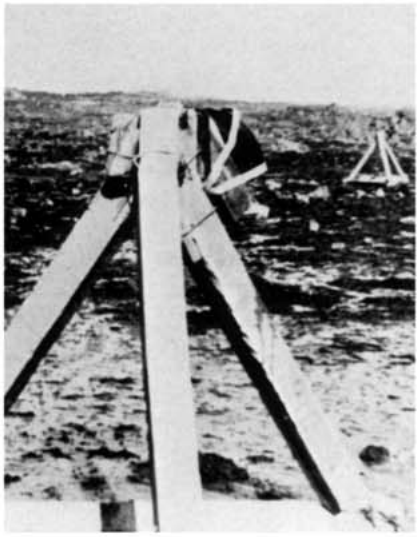


The main German anti-tank mine was known as the Tellermine. There were basically three types, namely the 35, 42 and 43, They consisted of a flat circular steel bottom, a steel body having a cylindrical side wall and a slightly dome-shaped top with a centrally located well into which a pressure cap was fitted. The mine also contained two other detonator wells, one on the side of the body and one in the bottom. These two detonator wells were used in conjunction with a ZZ35 pull igniter when the mines were booby-trapped. German field engineers made full use of their two basic igniters, which gave them full flexibility with all their mines and booby traps, etc. The ZZ35 pressure igniter was used with deadly efficiency in the 'S' mine and 'Schu' mine, whereas the ZZ35 pull igniter was used in conjunction with 'Schu' mines, roll bombs and also to booby-trap Tellermines. It was also used effectively in conjunction with the anti-paratroop 'spiders' which covered half the island.


Konstruktionszeichnung
der im
Dauerminenfeld
„Guernsey 43"
(Baie de la Forge)
verlegten 30 Behelfsminen / B.B
Druckdeckel
Schnitt A-B
Sicherungsbolzen
Schnitt C-D
Halte Klappen
Sprengkörper
Zugzünder 35
Druckblech
Splint
Kasten
Die Behelfsmine detoniert bei einer Belastung von 25 kg. Durch den notwendigen Druck auf den Druckdeckel wird damit auf die beiden Druckbleche gewirkt, die an diesen befindlichen Halteklappen wieder in die alte Lage gebracht und geben den Weg für die Abwärtsbewegung der Druckbleche frei. Hierdurch wird der mit einem Splint an die Druckbleche befestigte Zugzünder 35 ausgelöst.

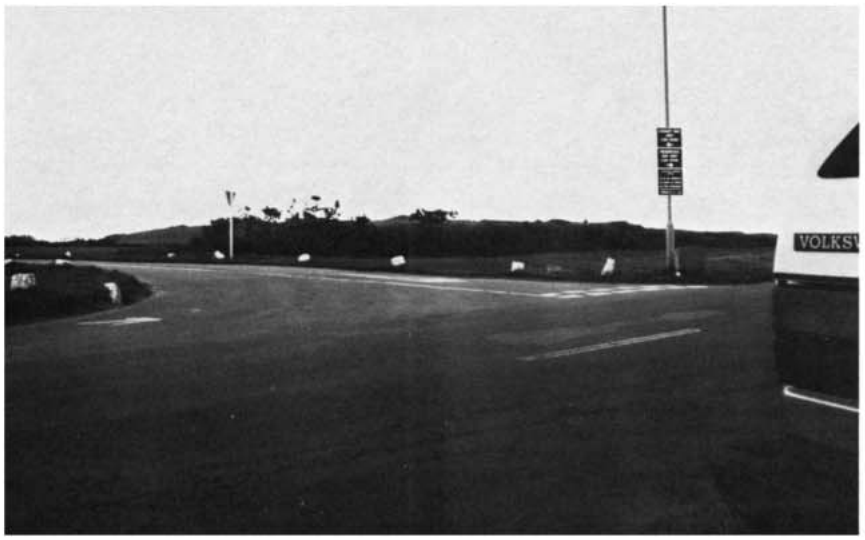


The last two types of mine were the 'B2' and 'B4'. *Left:* The 'B2' mine had been developed by 319. Pionier-Bataillon for use in the Channel Islands, presumably because their stocks of the standard anti-personnel mines had been exhausted. It consisted of a wooden box with a separate wooden lid, attached to which were two metal strips which led down below the small explosive charge to the pin in the ZZ35 igniter. Pressure on the lid caused a pull on the igniter which in turn detonated the mine. A simple nail was used as the safety pin to the mine prior to it being laid. *Right:* Then there was the 'B4'. This also consisted of a wooden box with a small charge placed in its base. A cantilevered piece of wood activated the ZZ35 igniter when the small block of wood which projected from the main casing was depressed.



Mines were also set up above ground, with no attempt at concealment, as a direct defence against invasion. *Above:* **Tetrahedra on the beaches were 'armed' with Tellermines although, after being subjected to the action of the sea for some two or three years, some of the mines had been washed off. The Royal Engineers found many scattered on the rocks or partially buried in the sand.**

On land, Tellermines had been attached to the anti-landing poles which had been set up on any stretch of open ground considered vulnerable to assault from the air. This is L'Ancresse Common — then and now.



All the beaches were obstructed with anti-tank girders set in the sand and wired to shells to protect against the landing of tanks and landing craft. There were also thousands of tetrahedra and Czech hedgehogs, many with Tellermines attached. The piers and jetties in St Peter Port and St Sampson's harbours had also been prepared for demolition using 27cm captured French shells, placed around the concrete columns supporting the jetties. There were also mined underwater obstacles in Petit Bot Bay, Fermain Bay and Saints Bay, consisting of Russian and French shells with pull igniters.

This, then, was the background to the immense task facing us on our arrival in the island of Guernsey and it is no overstatement to say that the Channel Islands were one of the most heavily fortified areas in Western Europe.

It was while I was at Weymouth, clearing British beach mines, that we received a signal on May 5, 1945, notifying us that Operation 'Nestegg' — the liberation of the Channel Islands — was to be launched. We returned to Fort Tregantle and commenced the task of loading all our vehicles and equipment ready for sailing. The Liberation Force had been split into two, one section of the force with the code-name 'AGENT' was to go to Guernsey, while the other, code-name 'BOOTY', would proceed to Jersey.

The 24 Bomb Disposal Platoon, RE, had also been divided into two detachments, one going to each of the islands. We sailed from Plymouth at 4.00 p.m. on May 11, and reached the islands shortly after 7.00 a.m. the following morning. Unloading the landing craft commenced an hour later.

It had been decided that I should proceed with the detachment bound for Jersey. On the first two days I carried out a general reconnaissance around the island, noting positions of minefields, flame-throwers, gun emplacements, etc. During the following week, 24 BD Platoon dealt with a large

Additional hazards facing 24 Bomb Disposal Platoon when they arrived on the island in May 1945 were French shells wired to the reinforced concrete columns of the piers. This is New Pier at St Peter Port — before and after.

Back in the 1970s, we discovered this excellent set of photographs while rummaging around in Charles Brown's old photographic shop in Worcester Park. Charles was known mainly for his aviation photography and one would not have thought of looking in his collection for mine-clearing! There were six pictures in all which are reproduced here.

amount of gelignite which had been stored at Fort Regent and was in a dangerous condition. We transported this explosive in small quantities in 3-ton lorries, in which we had placed two layers of filled sandbags over the whole of the floor, to the golf course where we disposed of it by burning.

On May 28, I left Jersey with the detachment and sailed for Guernsey. On arrival I made my way to Montville Road, Les Vardes, where the detachment of my unit which had landed directly in Guernsey on May 12 had made their billets. The unit was again complete and up to full strength. We settled into three large detached houses, the one on the corner of Montville Road and Havelands Road becoming unit headquarters.

Later that day I reported to the Commander Royal Engineers, Lieutenant-Colonel Wilkinson, who had established his headquarters at Hadsley House in the High Street in St Peter Port, when I received my orders as Officer Commanding 24 Bomb Disposal Platoon to take over the responsibilities of minefield clearance from 259 Field Company, RE. A meeting had been arranged between myself and Hauptmann Kias, the German engineer officer formerly in charge of Pionier-Bataillon 319 (the German equivalent of a Field Company RE which was part of 319. Division). With Hauptmann Kias was a German corporal, Obergefreiter Adt, who spoke perfect English and was to act as interpreter between Kias and myself for the next twelve months.

It had been arranged that German PoWs of the Engineer Unit would be responsible for clearance of all minefields and explosive charges under the supervision of British sappers and, to this end, it had been agreed to retain some 300 prisoners-of-war to undertake this work. We had some 30 NCOs and sappers available in 24 Bomb Disposal Platoon, so it meant that each one of them could command a working party of 10 PoWs. We therefore had around 30 working parties available daily to undertake all the work of clearance.

No. 259 Field Company had already started work on the minefields, beginning with Minefield No. 117 which protected the airfield and consisted of 4,147 'Schu' mines. They were also working in Minefield No. 97 in the area of L'Ancresse Bay which consisted of 1,111 'S' mines and 367 Tellermines. The third minefield which they were clearing was situated at Mount Crevelt (adjacent to St Sampson's Harbour) which comprised a total of 1,452 'S' mines, 259 'Schu' mines, 403 Tellermines and 1,124 French anti-tank mines. When 259 Field Company were withdrawn from Guernsey for duties in Sark and Alderney, my unit became responsible for all future minefield clearance as from May 28.

Charles could not recall exactly where he had taken them, and there was little in the background to identify the location. More confusing, they were mixed in with other pictures taken on two of the other islands, Alderney and Jersey. We took the photos with us in 1979 when researching *The War in the Channel Islands Then and Now*.

Left: **The only picture to bear any real clue was this one on which the 'legs' of a water tower were just visible in the left background. The prisoner, who appears to bear the scars of battle from a wound in his side, is stretching out a line between Punkt Points to establish the base line for a rather overgrown minefield. Small marker flags have been placed beside mines to be lifted.** *Right:* **We discovered that the water tower still existed to the east of the aerodrome on Guernsey at which point all the pictures in the series fell into place. This is the comparison we took at the time.**

On Guernsey the Germans had adopted a system of designating all north-south roads 'Rote' (red) and those running east-west as 'Gelb' (yellow). Kias and I would meet each morning at a pre-arranged rendezvous point, an example being where Red Road 3 intersected Yellow Road 5. Kias would bring with him the relevant plans for the minefields in which we would be working that particular day, and it was his responsibility to establish the base-line of each minefield before the troops went to work.

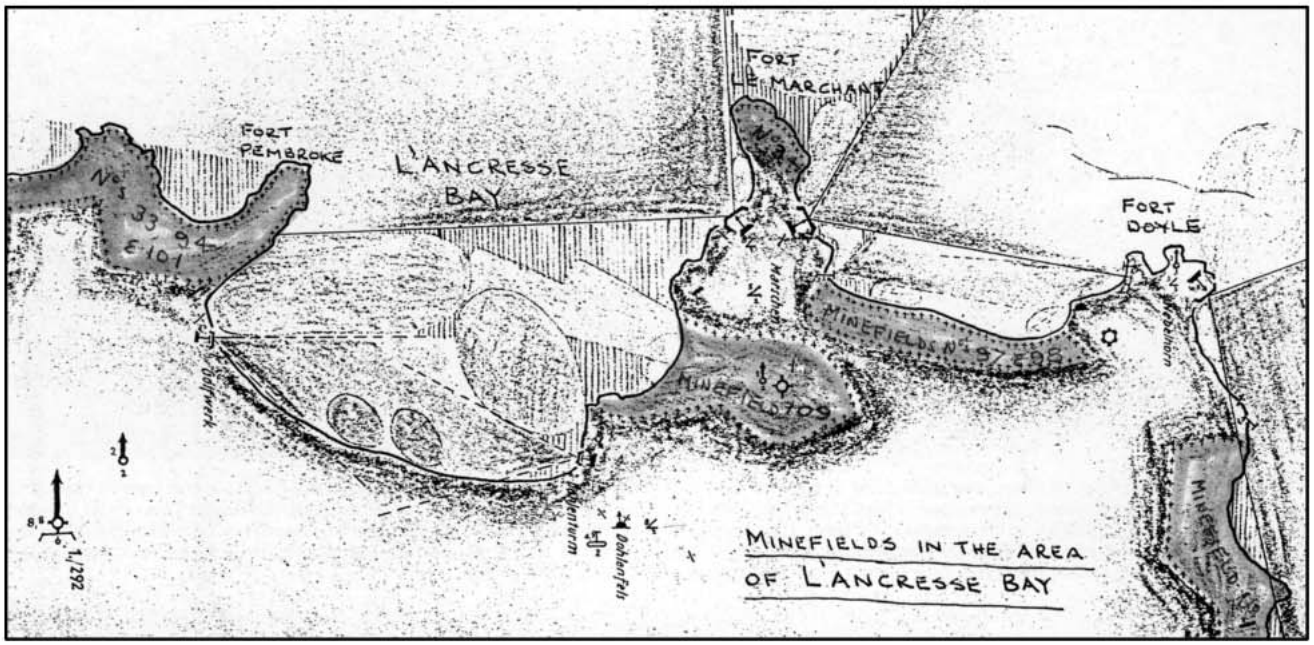
The base-line was established from what were known as 'Punkt Points'. These were small blocks of concrete which carried an identifying mark such as P1, P2, etc. First and foremost, it must be said that, when it came to lifting the mines, the thoroughness of Hauptmann Kias and his detailed minefield plans were to save many lives. The minefield charts were very accurate; all had serial numbers, and there was a separate chart for each section of the minefield.

The working parties initially were broken down as follows:

1. Minefield clearance.
2. Anti-landing pole clearance.
3. Transporting mines to quarry dump.
4. Clearing beaches of tetrahedra, etc.
5. Check sweeping minefields.
6. Clearance of barbed wire to quarry dump.

The types of mine which had been laid were, as has been described, predominantly anti-personnel, with German anti-tank Tellermines and a large number of captured British and French mines. Clearance on the perimeter of the airfield was completed by May 26 after no fewer than 4,100 'Schu' and 600 French anti-tank mines had been lifted.

The sequence was proved to have been taken in Minefield 117 which was the first one to be tackled when 259 Field Company arrived on the island. Charles Brown had stumbled on history and we must be grateful for his foresight in recording an event outside his normal sphere of interest. The lieutenant in the pictures is not our author as they were taken just before he took over responsibility for clearing Guernsey with 24 BD Platoon. German prisoners, supervised by Hauptmann Kias who knew the minefields intimately, worked under the British sappers but not at gunpoint. Charles probably asked the NCO in this shot to adopt a threatening attitude with his Sten (unloaded) merely for effect. We included three of the pictures in the book published in 1981 and were pleased Charles was able to see the finished result just a few months before he died.



Our first casualties occurred on May 28 in a minefield at L'Ancresse (No. 97) which consisted of 1,100 'S' mines. A German PoW stepped on an 'S' mine which resulted in two PoWs being killed, a British sapper and another German being wounded.

Clearance of minefields carried on at a great pace throughout June and July with an average of 1,500 mines being lifted daily. This progress was, however, not without further casualties which in every case resulted from 'S' mines. On June 4 we had our second accident in Minefield No. 116 which consisted of 285 'S' mines, 2,638 'Schu' mines and 54 Tellermines and formed the protective zone around Batterie Rinozerous at St Saviour's. Also on this date work was being undertaken in Minefield No. 79 which was situated on the cliff-top above Soldiers Bay where a 500lb unexploded British bomb was found lying just below the surface — presumably one dropped during the raid on the radar installations at Fort George carried out by the RCAF in 1944.

On the following day, June 5, we had two further accidents. The first occurred in the morning in Minefield No. 97 adjacent to Fort Doyle, and in the afternoon in No. 100 which was situated at La Benetts. On the 12th we had a PoW wounded by an explosion in Minefield No. 14 at Le Bigard on the south coast, and on the 14th a further injury in Field No. 113 at L'Eree.

GERMAN POWs KILLED IN 1945 DURING MINE CLEARANCE ON GUERNSEY

MAY 28

In Minefield No. 97 at L'Ancresse Bay
Feldwebel Gustav Schmeck
Gefreiter Erich Kötel

JUNE 5

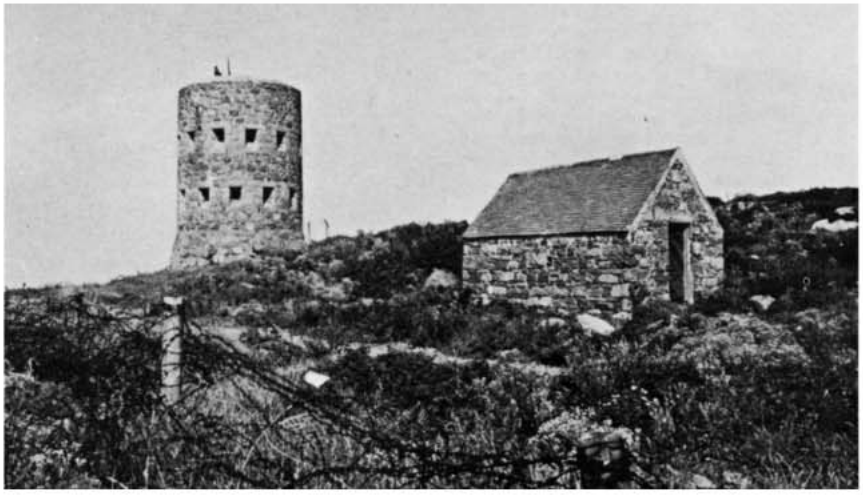
In Minefield No. 97 at L'Ancresse Bay
Unteroffizier Herman Müller
Obergefreiter Willi Schuch

In Minefield No. 100 at La Benetts
Obergefreiter Maximilian Walter

JULY 13

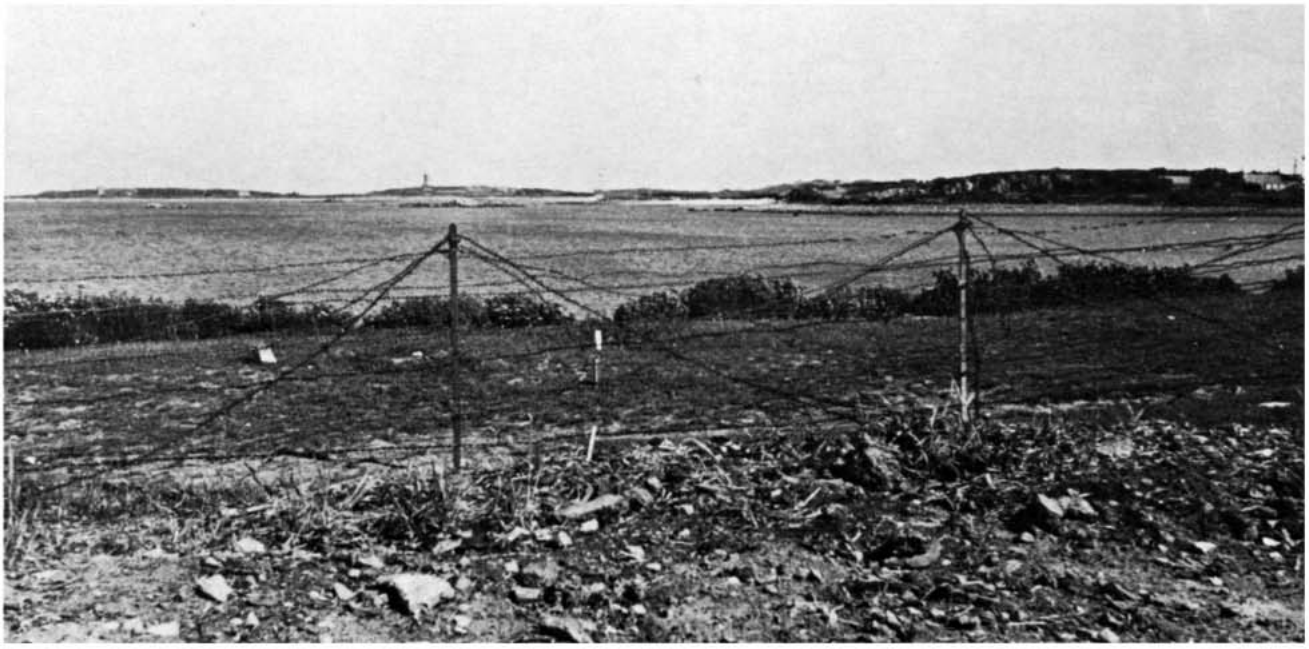
In Minefield No. 44 at Les Crêtes
Obergefreiter Heinrich Fröhlich

Working twelve hours a day, seven days a week, it was inevitable that there would be casualties, and the first of six German fatalities occurred on May 28 when Feldwebel Gustav Schmeck and Gefreiter Erich Kötel were killed in Minefield 97 at L'Ancresse Bay. Harry Beckingham comments that 'the most dangerous time was just after the morning break at about ten o'clock, or restarting work after lunch, when concentration had been broken. Most of the PoWs were killed going forward and tripping an 'S' mine. The person treading on the mine would hear a click before it exploded, and one brave chap, on hearing the click, kept his foot on the mine to stop it blowing out of the ground. He was lucky and only lost a leg.'



L'Ancresse Bay. The wire in the foreground denotes the perimeter of the minefield.

This tower which the Germans used as an observation post still survives.



Above: **This picture is interesting, for not only does it show the wire protecting Minefield No. 32 at Rousse but we can also see, in the far distance across the bay, the observation tower MP1 at Chouet where all the defuzed mines were dumped.** *Below:* **Harry returns with detector making a nice comparison. He is actually in Minefield No. 108 (which was a continuation of No. 32) just a few hundred yards further along to the west at Baie de Port Grat where over 800 mines all went off in one go!**

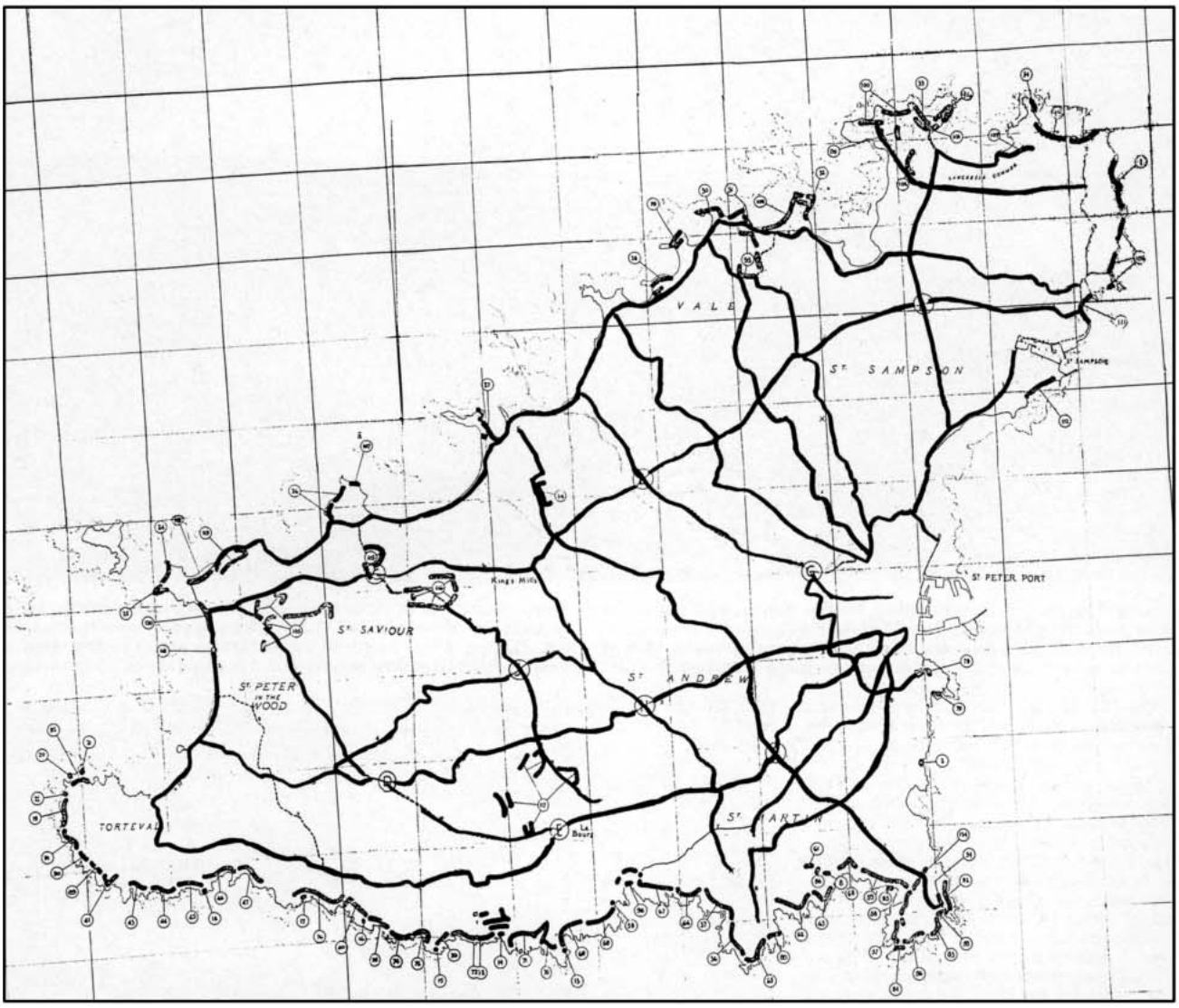
On July 12, work commenced to clear a minefield at Baie de Port Grat (No. 108). This consisted of 392 Tellermines, and 467 French anti-tank mines, all of which had been fitted with anti-handling devices fixed beneath them. These mines could not be lifted without a great risk of loss of life, so I decided that each mine would have to be detonated separately. Notices were printed in the *Guernsey Press* to warn local residents. The coast road adjacent to the minefield was sealed off and the few local residents with cottages fronting on to the road were evacuated. I sandbagged the first mine and placed a small charge on it with further sandbags on top to deaden the blast. I then retired to a safety point with the exploder. When I pushed down on the plunger there was a terrific explosion and the whole of the minefield went up in one huge bang as the shockwave caused sympathetic detonation across the field.

A Mrs Duquemin lived in one of the cottages on the roadside and unfortunately the blast had taken the roof off her property and caused considerable damage. However, when I met her to explain what had happened, her reply to me was simply: 'Don't worry, you have got rid of the Germans, now you have got rid of the mines, so we can now rebuild our homes and live in peace.' I then arranged for a number of workmen to start work immediately on repairing her property.

In the summer of 1989 I had the good fortune to meet Mrs Duquemin's son who asked me if I remembered the words his mother had said to me all those years before when I asked her to vacate her cottage. He reminded me that she had said: 'I haven't moved out of the cottage for the Germans so I am not going to move out for you.' Thank goodness she carried out my wishes.

Another Guernsey man who remembers this incident is Leonard Le Tissier of La Vaugrat, St Sampson's, who told me that the blast literally moved one of the greenhouses in an adjacent field completely off its foundations. On a recent visit to the island, Mr Le Tissier took me back into the old minefield to show me some of the craters which had been formed by the explosion. A lot of these have now been filled in, but many, although now covered with grass, can still be identified.

Harry (right) with Mr Duquemin and Mr Le Tissier (no relation to 'our' Lieutenant Colonel on page 1 although Tony also comes from Guernsey) on the spot where the big bang occurred 44 years ago.



The German engineers used names for their minefields, but the REs gave each a number on their overall plan *(above)*.

The fact that all minefield clearance in Guernsey was completed by July 25, 1945 shows the remarkable speed of the operation, bearing in mind clearance had only commenced on May 18. It was an exceptional feat when one remembers that nearly 65,000 mines were dealt with over a period of two months. Six German PoWs had lost their lives and fourteen had been wounded, some seriously. However, the sacrifice would have been much greater if we had not been provided with accurate plans.

MINEFIELD LOCATIONS IN GUERNSEY (ROYAL ENGINEERS' NUMBERING)

Field No.	*Location*
1	Croix Besnard
2	Trappe Vill Du Purron
8	Moulin Huet
13	Point De La Moye
14	Le Bigard
15	La Corbiere
16	Clifton Valley Cottage
17	Le Creux Maire
18	Belle Elizabeth
19	Pleimont
20	Compass Rock
21	Pezeiries Point
22	La Gross Rock
24	Fort Saumarez
26	Fort Richmond
27	Fort Hommet
28	Port Soif
29	Portinfer
30	Pulias West
31	Pulias East
32	Rousse
33	Creve Coeur
34	Fort Le Marchant
36	Le Creux Au Chien
37	La Bette La Jabnnet
38	Portelet Bay
39	La Corbiere
40	Les Ecrilleurs
41	L'Angle
43	Baie De La Forge
44	Les Crêtes
45	Mont Berault
46	Le Long Cavaleux
47	Les Bouffeures
54	Fourguire
55	Grand Grune
56	La Moye Battery
57	Jerbourg West
58	Doyle Column
59	La Bouver
60	Le Mont Durant
61	Moulin Huet Bay
62	Ben Port
63	La Fosse
65	Icart
66	Mont Hubert East
67	Mont Hubert West
68	Les Soumsilleuses East
69	Les Soumsilleuses West
70	Coufere Hotel
71	Water Fall
72	Le Manor De La Bigano
73	Prevote Watch Hse
74	Le Haises
75	Roulette
76	Le Creux Mahie
78	Ander Serpentine
79	Soldiers Bay
82	Jerbourg Battery
83	Vau Bette
84	Jerbourg Point
85	Petit Port
86	Moulet Huet Bay
88	Saints Bay
89	Pleimont Watch House
90	Pleimont Torteval
91	Pleimont Point
92	Fort Pezeries
94	Fort Pembroke
95	Battery Sampson
96	Petit Bot Bay
97	Moulon
98	Fontenelle Bay
100	La Benetts
101	Fort Pembroke
103	Petils Bay
105	Battery Miras
106	La Varde
107	Fort Le Crocq
108	Baie De Port Grat
109	Banque De Barque
110	Mont Cuet
111	La Banque Imbert
112	Mount Crevelt
113	L'Eree
114	Catel
115	Le Marais
116	Mont Saint
117	Aerodrome
118	Roque Boisson
119	Perelle
121	Hommet Parade
124	Jerbourg

Whilst minefield clearance was taking place, a number of other operations were going on simultaneously. One entailed the removal of all anti-landing devices on the beaches, the majority of which had a Teller-mine attached. Every beach around the island was affected. Portelet Harbour was the first to be cleared, the area designated by the serial number 712. Rocquaine Bay (711), Saline Bay (705) and Cobo Bay (706) were then cleared on the 31st. This was a two-part operation. One working party was employed on the removal of charges, and they were followed up by another party who removed the stakes themselves. Removal of the remainder of the obstacles around the coast and in the bays continued until the end of June 1945, with the exception of the special underwater obstacles situated in Fermain Bay, Saints Bay and Petit Bot Bay.

The third major task was the clearance of the anti-air landing poles which were extensive and covered a very large area of the island. As mentioned earlier, a large number of the poles were mined. This operation was systematically carried out by concentrating on one map reference square at a time until the whole area of the island was clean. Once the poles had been cleared, further working parties were employed to remove all the barbed wire. This job was completed by the end of July 1945.

Having cleared the beaches and the interior of the island of explosives, we then turned our attention to the cliffs along the south coast where the roll bombs had been hung on the cliff faces. This operation commenced on June 12 and was completed by July 25, during which time nearly 1,000 roll bombs were destroyed. Warning notices were published in the Press warning people that these bombs were to be detonated in situ and asking people in the vicinity to open all their doors and windows to minimise damage caused by blast. Unfortunately there were a few unscrupulous people who tried to capitalise from this operation, and we received claims for compensation for damage caused to greenhouses which were located many miles away from the detonation area and could not possibly have been affected.

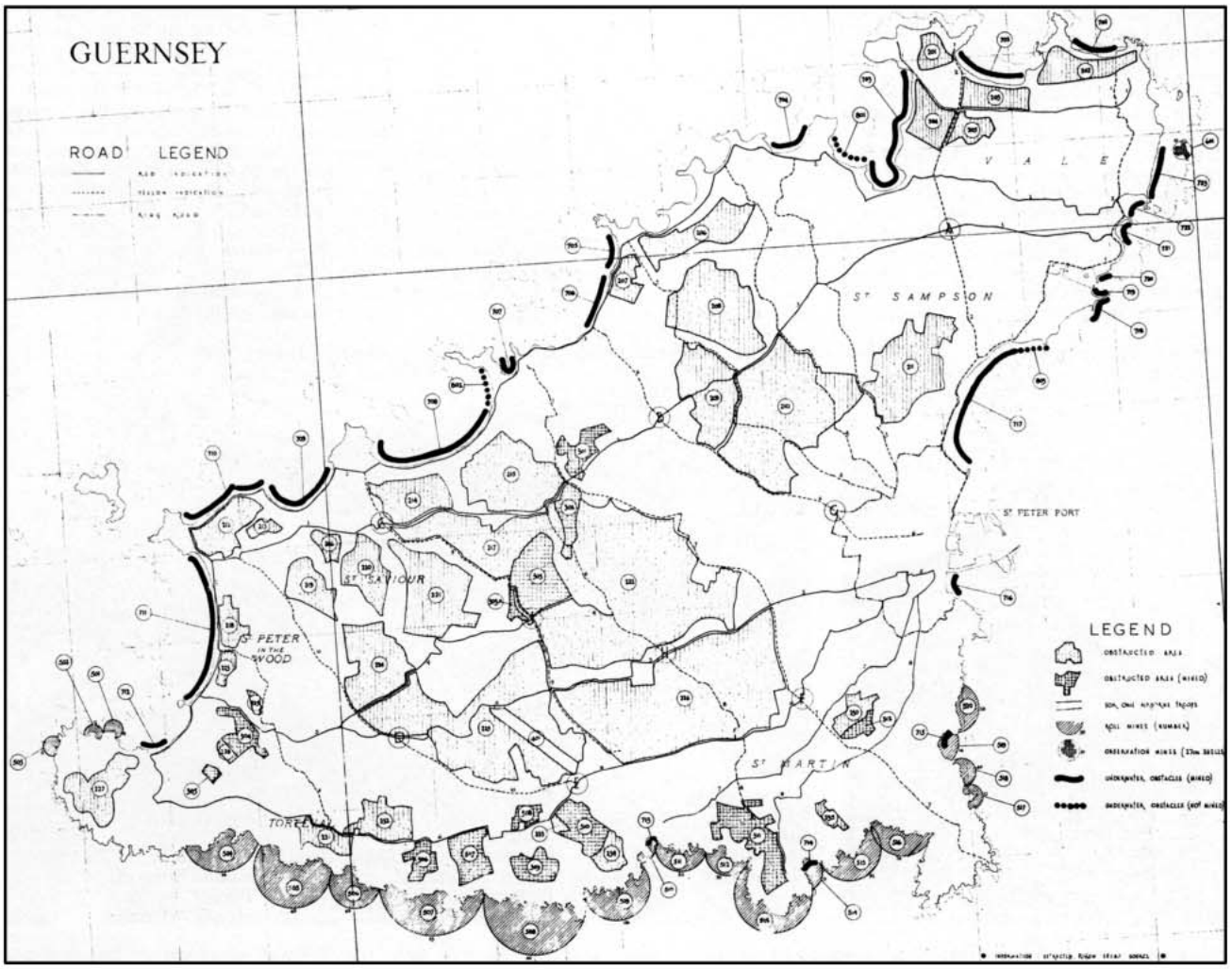
All the tasks described were undertaken by the 300 German PoWs working on minefield clearance, with another 300 civilians who were employed in clearing all the barbed wire which was everywhere on the island.

When the Luftwaffe bombed St Peter Port back in 1940, three 250kg bombs fell in the area of La Capelles and failed to explode. The Germans did nothing about defuzing them and these three unexploded bombs lay silent and lethal for over five years. We found the holes of entry on the site of disused greenhouses. Each bomb had pentrated to a depth of 20 to 25 feet. Two of the bombs had impact fuzes fitted, the third had a delayed-action clockwork fuze which could be set to detonate the bomb any time up to 80 hours after it had been dropped.

There were two recognised methods of handling any bomb with this particular fuze. The first method was to place over the fuze head a powerful electro-magnet which would jam the clock mechanism, thus allowing the bomb to be moved to a safe area where the explosive charge could be steamed out. This method had to be ruled out because we had not got the necessary equipment, i.e. a Merrylees boiler and trepanning machine. I therefore decided to use the alternative method. The bomb was transported to Chouet quarry with the clock-stopper in place. It was then unloaded and an electric stethoscope placed on the bomb casing which led back to our safety point behind a sand-bagged wall. I then removed the clock-stopper but, with the stethoscope still in place, drilled a hole in the head of the fuze and injected under pressure a strong solution of sugar and water to jam the clockwork mechanism. The clock-stopper was kept handy during the whole of this operation just in case the clock did start to tick. When I was satisfied that the clock had jammed, we removed all our equipment and detonated the bomb by placing a charge on the casing.

We could simply have placed the charge on the bomb and detonated it once it had been unloaded in the quarry, but there was a risk that the clockwork fuze could have had only a few seconds to run before actuating the bomb. Bearing in mind that the clock-stopper was a very heavy piece of equipment which needed two men to carry, it was considered far safer to jam the fuze so that the men could take the clock-stopper back to the safety point without fear of detonation taking place within seconds of its removal.

With all known minefields, landing poles and beach obstacles cleared by the end of July, there remained only the underwater obstacles situated in Fermain, Petit Bot and Saints Bays. These consisted of steel girders



All other anti-landing devices had to be cleared — mined tetrahedra on the beaches, roll bombs on the cliffs, and the obstructed areas inland. This contemporary RE plan indicates the extent of the problem which lasted until April 1946.

Harry explains that the ten stages for clearing a minefield were as follows: 1. Put out Punkt line; 2. Measure position of mine; 3. Mark mine; 4. Insert safety pin; 5. Lift mine with bayonet; 6. Take to end of field; 7. Count mines; 8. Remove igniters; 9. Transport to the disused Chouet Quarry *(above)*; 10. Check sweep and issue certificate of clearance.

to which were attached wires leading to 300lb French shells buried in the sand. These obstacles were below water even at spring tides and, to add to the problem, I was told that the main telephone cable between Jersey and the island entered the sea in Saints Bay and under no circumstances could these obstacles be removed by detonation.

I decided that the only way of tackling these obstacles would be for me to don a diving suit to enable me to stay under water long enough to render these shells safe prior to their removal. I therefore asked the naval authorities in England if I could borrow a self-contained diving suit and all the necessary equipment. Once this had arrived on the island, the next step was to wait for a spring tide so that I would be working in a minimum depth of water. On Thursday and Friday, August 16-17, 1945, I set about the task of clearing these obstacles in Fermain and Petit Bot Bays, and the whole exercise went without a hitch.

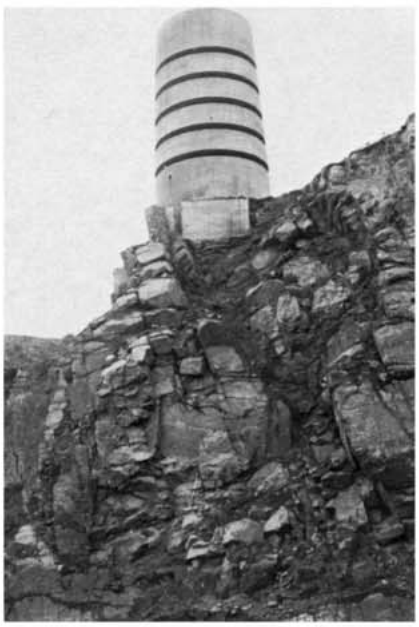
Having gained my confidence as a diver, I decided to tackle the obstacles in Saints Bay, and warning notices appeared in the Press warning all civilians not to approach within 500 yards on September 22-23, which coincided again with the spring tides.

We started work at low water and had cleared about four obstacles and were about to start on the fifth when a wave suddenly rocked me back on my heels. I made an instinctive grab for the girder when a PoW standing alongside shouted: 'Nein Oberleutnant!' He probably not only saved my life but his own, although possibly it was the latter that was more important to him!

No further unforeseen incidents took place and Saints Bay was cleared of all its deadly impedimenta, yet I often wonder whether the thousands of holidaymakers who sit on and swim off the beach in the bay each summer realise what it was like back in 1945.

At the beginning of April 1946, it had been arranged that all the German PoWs who had worked hard and diligently over the previous months in clearing the island were to be transported to England. At my last meeting with Hauptmann Kias he presented me with his map case and other military items, saying that he would have no further use for them.

Today, Guernsey is a much safer place than when I first landed there in 1945 although I suspect that there could still be the odd roll bomb or Tellermine buried under the sand on the beaches.



The recovered mines were not blown up but just dumped in the quarry and left. This created an enormous problem in the 1960s when a shortage of stone necessitated the re-opening of the quarry whereupon all Harry's mines had to be painstakingly cleared. All this time the German observation tower stood precariously on the edge but, in the end, quarrying activities had so weakened the cliff face that on March 25, 1991, the whole structure came tumbling down. (Guernsey Press)

SPEAR OF DESTRUCTION

By W. J. Mills

As 1944 moved inexorably towards its close, the war at last seemed to be moving in the Allies' favour. One of the keys to our success was petrol. Some parts of our company were as near as possible to the front line so that the forward troops could quickly be supplied with petrol. Unfortunately, before our tankers could get through, the Schelde had to be cleared of German troops well dug in on the many islands.

Days and dates were unknown as was letter writing to our loved ones — not even a backdated newspaper. To my surprise we were in December, nothing can explain why I was so much looking forward to Christmas. I would be at the docks unloading petrol but if we could turn the tanker round quickly, the captain would 'reward' us with a cooked chicken, a loaf of bread and a pound of butter — all very welcome as food was short.

The company's headquarters were in the old American Embassy in Antwerp, a death trap, as the ceilings were about ten feet high, with a three-foot wide glass top section.

Flashback to Antwerp in 1944 and *After the Battle* No. 57. Then the city was under almost ceaseless bombardment from V1s and V2s, one incident on December 16 killing 567 including 296 Allied personnel in the Rex Cinema just off Teniers Square, seen here *(top)* in the aftermath of an earlier horrific V2 incident on November 27. Now we have just heard from one of our readers, ex-Private Jim Mills, who was in the cinema when it was hit *(left)*. This is his story, illustrated with pictures sent to him by a Canadian orderly after it was all over. *Right:* The Rex today, pictured by Achiel Rely.

Jim's first photo. The caption written on the back says: 'Here you can see the dome that saved your life! The "X" marks it.'

We slept on the floor and the vibration from an exploding V1 or V2 went through one's body so in seconds we were wide awake. Several had already fallen very close to us.

My platoon was working on the docks, unloading petrol from ship to shore and then filling road tankers of all sizes non-stop. We decided after a debate with the officers that the best way to stay alive was to live on top of our job. One house took all twenty-eight of us, but there was plenty of room, as some were always out working nearby.

During one raid we lost our conservatory, which our two cooks had used as a kitchen, in a near miss. Incredibly, nobody was injured but there was glass everywhere, including all the trays of food. The officers first instructions were to bury it all, but after pleas from the two civilians, they were allowed to take it home where they removed the glass from the food by repeatedly putting it through sieves made from rolls of silk, the two families enjoying their best meal for years. Even today I can hardly believe that neither family suffered any ill effects. Also during this incident a door flew by me at about 90 mph, but by then I was under the sink!

One very foggy night that month we were expecting a ship at any time. We were sitting fully prepared along the corridor of the house, so that if one came in we were ready to commence work at once. Suddenly there was an almighty explosion from a V1 or V2 — we never knew which — almost on top of us. Again a door went by like an express train. I ended up with a large window frame narrowly missing my head. Slowly, about five of us sorted out the debris and once again, to our joy, nobody was hurt. We agreed that the fog had saved our lives that night as the tanker had anchored out to sea until it could see its way in. We about-turned the ship in record time, getting our usual reward.

In any spare time my thoughts were full of Christmas. I had already sent off presents to England but how or where would we celebrate it? It was very doubtful that we would not be unloading a tanker. The seamen lived well (as they deserved to), so perhaps a piece of Christmas pudding and cake would be part of our reward for turning them round at full speed all the time. It was a mystery how the pumps never seized as they became red hot, glowing in the dark.

December 16, 1944. There was no way I could have known how my whole life would be changed that day. I cannot remember why but I was at the HQ in Antwerp as the gang and I took over at the docks at 5 p.m. that evening. In the meantime, another platoon, in which a friend of mine was serving, reported into HQ. After a meal, as we had plenty to talk about, we moved on to an ENSA show, but it was a full house, so we crossed the road to the Rex Cinema. A cowboy film was showing which was not too old so we decided to go in and afterwards shake hands and go our separate ways.

We all settled in our seats when, at two minutes past three, there was a spear-shaped flash with many colours in it and a roaring explosion, with the spearhead flash becoming longer and longer. Everything around us was breaking away into thousands of pieces. At that moment a very strong arm gripped me tightly along my back to my left shoulder. A strong voice told me I would be badly injured but would live. I was no longer frightened. There is no doubt in my mind now that this actually happened to me. As all around us was crashing down — the noise was tremendous. It was so great that words cannot fully explain the situation. After a few minutes came the opposite — deadly quiet. No shouts for help or cries of agony. It was as if everyone were dead.

The first photograph adds meaning to my words as this was taken shortly afterwards. As you can see, the dome of the cinema saved our lives. A telegram to my parents stated that I was buried under ten tons of rubble. By now we had made contact with the outside world. Inside I had taken a roll-call. A lad of about eight and an elderly gentleman seventy-plus were not hurt at all. One lad of fourteen had his left leg almost torn off, buried by piles of rubble. There was death everywhere. There were three of us left from the Army. Somehow a soldier had been forced across my head but was still alive. My friend's left leg was less damaged compared with his right and I had suffered most damage to my left leg. This meant at the end of the day my friend lost his left leg below the knee, and his right leg above the knee whereas I lost my right leg below the knee and my left leg above.

They found the 14-year-old lad and in came a doctor and amputated his left leg as he lay there. Silence! Thirty seconds and he was on a stretcher being rushed to a brick hospital where a Canadian company was in full control.

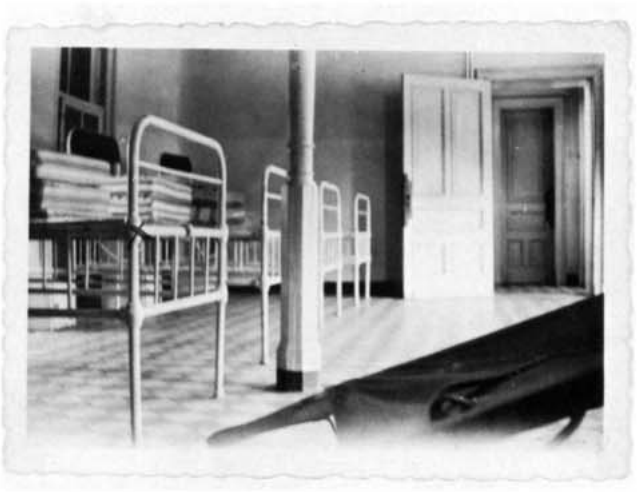
There was no lifting gear but they managed to get hold of a coal miner who knew how to shore up the wreckage to prevent a collapse. The night progressed until it was possible to release us. The second photograph shows the thickness of rubble on my legs. Unknown to me, my left foot was hanging on by a quarter-inch of flesh. Being a first-aid man, I did all I could to regulate my bleeding as well as those near me. Along came the REs with a monster drill. A small clearance was made so the lad and the old gentleman could get out. No doubt even today the lad tells his remarkable story.

I had no idea of the time, but I was in that situation until 6.30 a.m. the next morning. Finally it was my turn to be freed. The drilling commenced just by my head right down to my feet. I had to shout a warning when the bit came to within a couple of inches of my face. At last I was free — good old REs. Even now I often wonder if the sapper chappie is still alive who said: 'Your shoe is nearly off mate. I'll take it off'. My reply must have knocked him for six: 'That's my foot!'

Now I crawled out, but would not move any further until I saw them get another lad out. On a stretcher I was trotted over the road to a hospital. While there, the Germans had enough sauce to plant another V1 so the windows and walls came tumbling down. The door opened: 'Alright Mills?' 'Yip', I replied.

The next exciting part was when an orderly came in with a monster pair of scissors. I thought what on earth is he going to do with *them*? I soon knew. He began cutting my clothing off which made me burst out laughing. 'What's so funny?' 'Well, my silly old fool of a store sergeant left England not indenting for anything to follow on. If he saw you and your scissors you would be done.'

Photo No. 2. 'This is part of the rubble you were pulled from under.'



Left: **Photo 3. 'Here is the ward you were in and the "X" again indicates the bed you were in. Taken shortly after your evacuation.'** *Right:* **Photo 4. 'This is the hospital you were in at Antwerp.' When we asked Bill, he could not remember the location of the hospital, but we put the question to Achiel Rely, author of the original article in issue 57. After an exhaustive search of all the hospitals in Antwerp, he confirmed that the picture shows the Military Hospital in the Marialei.**

Then I passed out, but it would have been glorious fun seeing him cutting away at my best 'Sunday Suit'.

Back with the living, I lay there in a monster plaster cast. All the windows had been blown out by further V1s and V2s and December was very cold with falling snow. With the mountain of work placed on this hospital blood plasma was short; even more so drugs. The young lad who had had his leg amputated under the rubble was next to me, and when the time came to change his dressings, I would grip his hand so he could draw on some of my strength. It did help I am sure.

My left leg had to be amputated because of gangrene. That afternoon my bed (see third photograph) was taken out of the ward down a slope into a massive cellar. The Germans had left only several large metal containers of dusting powder. Before me was a large bench consisting of planks of wood about six feet long, packets of cotton wool, rubber tubing, a pair of hinges, a saw, hammer, screwdriver, metal cutter, nails and screws.

No one was talking to me as the two doctors had a debate between themselves. The next minute one was sizing up my left leg with a piece of timber. This was cut to size plus three more pieces. The other doctor was making an incredible din hammering the metal cans into long half-circles after first cutting them into oblong strips. One small square of wood was placed at the nearest end to me with a full size circle cut out, and another piece of timber at the far end with only a small hole in the cover. Through this ran a piece of rubber tubing. The metal pieces covered the bottom which was in turn covered with cotton wool. The whole lot was nailed together with a lid hinged on top. My left leg was then put inside and the doctors, having admired their efforts, went off.

A nursing sister appeared and asked: 'How are you, Mills?' Reply: 'I have almost had enough', to which she said it would not be long now. Charming.

The doctors returned and pushed me on the bed with the contraption up to the ward. There they opened the lid and commenced filling the box with cubes of ice. As this melted it ran out through the tube into a bucket. At last the conversation was directed to me. 'Lad, make sure it is kept filled with ice.' From all over the hospital people came to see the model which would save my life. Finally to the operating theatre.

Unbeknown to me, I was being returned to the ward minus my left leg, when there was another almighty explosion. I remember seeing only the flash. Photo four shows where I went through the corridor roof. I have no idea what happened to the orderlies who were pushing me along at the time. Eventually I came to on a pile of rubble and I heard a voice like a nightingale call: 'He is up here.' A nurse had found me. She repeated her call several times before a couple of orderlies got me down and carried me back to the ward.

An orderly came back with a bowl of hot water. 'Mills, you do look dirty!' whereupon I suggested that he should have come on my journey into space.

Christmas Day came but no tea, only a glass of tomato juice which I drank holding my nose. Horrible. Too weak to feed myself, an orderly gave me the first course followed by pudding and custard. Nothing was left. Father Christmas gave me a stocking about five feet long — an Aladdin's Cave with so many presents that I never reached the end of it. What a day thanks to those lovely Canadians. They gave me a good start, so at 72 I am still plodding around on my two artificial legs. Thanks also to all those who cared for me afterwards.

By May 1946 Jim was back at his old job at International Stores where he stayed until made redundant when British American Tobacco took the company over. 'I could not travel far to find alternative work,' writes Jim, 'and when my parents passed away I thought it was more sensible to go into a home. It took a year to make all the arrangements. In the end a letter arrived for me to report to the Queen Alexandra Hospital Home at Gifford House in Worthing on August 9, 1981 with all my worldly goods. Now I live in Elizabeth Wing. Les, my friend, took the photograph of me — the other was taken in July 1990 when I was preparing for our Open Day. I was selling tea and tea-towels and made about £462.'

WILLIAM P. PREDDY
LT 503 FTR SQ 339 FTR GP
NORTH CAROLINA APR 17 1945
42
ALPHONSE A. DEMARS
43
NORMAN E. DEMARS
48
GEORGE E. PREDDY JR
MAJ 328 FTR SQ 352 FTR GP
NORTH CAROLINA DEC 25 1944